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THE STORIES EDITORS BUY AND WHY

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THE STORIES EDITORS BUY AND WHY

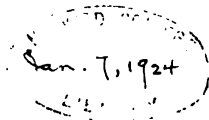
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TO MAGAZINE EDITORS

*Who
through constructive helpfulness
and creative vision
are helping authors to make
the American short story
unique in artistry and literary merit.*

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PREFATORY NOTE

During the past twenty years the short story has come to occupy a distinct place in American letters. While it must perhaps be granted that we are not pre-eminent in the novel or the essay, we may quite fairly pride ourselves upon the high achievement of our authors in short story writing. American magazines (and this is said in no spirit of braggadocio) today carry more and better short stories than do the magazines of any other country. In addition it should be taken into consideration that we in America publish a greater number of periodicals devoted either wholly or in part to fiction than is the custom elsewhere. Thus automatically the would-be short story writer is given opportunity and encouragement, two powerful factors in all creative endeavor. Success in short story writing means both fame and pecuniary reward. It is professionally worth while both from the artistic and the financial points of view.

To the American editor should be given much of the credit for this development in the short story. A story, no matter how vital or well written, carries no real weight until it is in print. The printed page gives it permanency; through print it reaches the multitude. The editor, at his or her desk, has final say as to what shall or shall not go into the pages of his or her magazine. There are often outside factors that shape the magazine's editorial and fiction policy. But editors are sincere in desiring to give their readers the best stories they can procure of the kind they are ready to publish.

But they do a great deal more than just select from the mass of material that is submitted to them. They go out after the type of stories they want. They see the men and women who can write and personally confer with them, suggesting new things to write about,

new trends in thought, new angles of approach, new methods of handling. To George Horace Lorimer certainly should go much of the credit for the evolution of the American business story; a chance remark of Ray Long's at editorial conference brought the first Pell Street tales into existence; it is no exaggeration to say that John M. Siddall with his search for clean-cut Americanism has had much to do with the growing prominence and popularity of American small town portrayal which popularity has in turn profoundly affected the development of the American novel; to Perriton Maxwell should be given the honor of having been the first to publish stories of Jewish life in one of our leading monthlies. Not only do the editors shape and mould the literary taste of their readers but they have and do actually create new forms of literary output.

The technique of the American short story is more or less fixed and numerous textbooks have been compiled thereon. But technique is not a rigid matter. The importance of the subject matter or sheer artistry can often "put over" a story that defies every one of the traditional or accepted rules. Too, different editors and different magazines have their own ideas on technique. Therefore, for any one who would write it is best to study and analyze carefully the pages of the various magazines.

To succeed in the short story field the writer needs not only to know how to write but where to sell. To get before the short story reading public it is vital not only to have a story to tell and to know how to tell it but to know also where to offer that story when it is told. In selling a short story it is not primarily the attitude of any one individual critic or group of self-appointed critics that matters; it is the attitude of the editor toward the particular story under consideration. As there are many stories there are many editors. They are all on the lookout for new and good material. If you have created a good story it is bound some day to find its publisher and thereby to reach its public.

In order that this book may be of practical service to the new writer and to those already well established

the editors were asked why they bought the particular stories they did, in other words their attitude in fiction buying. Their replies are printed verbatim. Many came in the form of personal letters and this will explain why there may be a certain lack of formality in some of the editorial replies. But on consideration this was decided the most practical way in which the editor might reach his audience. Analysis of the answers will show the veriest tyro that a story that might do excellently for the Metropolitan need not be desired by the Dial and vice versa.

In the compiler's mind the magazines automatically group themselves into classes, a grouping which attempts to reach no conclusion as to relative literary or commercial values. Certain of these magazines were asked to include a story that had appeared in its pages and which from the point of view of that magazine's editorial policy was a highly desirable and good story. Here the editors hesitated: they had many good stories that might be included. Eventually, though, choices were made and the authors kindly consenting to their reprinting, the stories are given herewith.

Here again it cannot be made too clear that no editorial verdict was attempted in including stories from some of the magazines and in omitting those from others. The aim of the book is to be of practical service in pointing out reasons for fiction buying. All of the magazines could not be included because of space limitation. As far as possible different types of magazines were chosen. The editors of these magazines again one and all were unanimous in making it clear that they could have suggested many other stories that had appeared in their pages that were equally good considered literarily or artistically. But as the book does attempt to guide and direct—so far as this is possible in an art—they chose stories that they considered representative in a major number of ways.

Our leading weeklies lay much emphasis upon their fiction. The Saturday Evening Post buys more short stories a year than does any other magazine. Because of its enormous circulation the contributor has the satisfaction of feeling that he or she is reaching a maximum num-

ber of readers. The style of stories in this magazine changes from year to year as the editor has been repeatedly heard to say that the reading public is apt to tire of any one type no matter how well done. The practical note is apt to preponderate. In Collier's, the National Weekly, we find a very American story, not exploiting big cities and millionaire circles, but rather the moderately income home of the average American—its good fortune, its vicissitudes, its every day point of view, handled with exquisite sympathy. Leslie's, limited in space, is frankly after the constructive business story.

In any consideration of the American monthly magazines automatically Harper's, Scribner's and Century come to mind in a group. These put great emphasis upon literary execution. The Atlantic Monthly is perhaps not quite so rigid in its demand for form while the Dial is almost radical. The Touchstone rates artistry most highly, the article by Mrs. Roberts in this book making her views on the whole matter most explicit.

There is another large group of monthly magazines, more generally popular perhaps, in which there is the very greatest diversity and yet differentiation of editorial wants. It will pay to study these magazines closely. The student will at once see why a story that might be most popular in the Metropolitan would not have a chance in the American—and at that no purely literary or technical point need be involved. In this group of magazines there is the greatest possible chance for divergence in story treatment, in subject matter, even in methods of characterization. Since Ray Long has taken over the Cosmopolitan he has repeatedly shown his catholicity of taste as has Karl Harriman in subject matter in the Red Book.

It is easy to decide which stories may prove suitable for our magazines that are primarily interested in sex problems, and this does not necessarily mean sex in any too realistic or too sordid sense. The editors who are selecting the material for these periodicals feel that sex is the fundamental motivation in every human act; that therefore its presentation is always interesting, of moment, and bound to intrigue a large group of readers. A cer-

tain number of the smaller of these magazines demand liveliness of presentation rather than newness of plot. All are apt to stress a certain up-to-date and social quality.

We have a large group of action magazines. They look for "story." In this group the Street and Smith periodicals are particularly interested in the story that has an American hero and an American environment. Some of the others are not quite so restrictive. Perhaps "a good yarn rattling well told" is the best slogan presentation of their wants. But like all slogans it is unfair. The frequent presence of Joseph Conrad in these magazines certainly would seem to prove that craftsmanship is appreciated.

The women's magazines make a point of carrying as good fiction as can be procured and in some of them we are finding the best short stories of the day. The Pictorial Review, for instance, is not circumscribed in its point of view; it has room for the purely artistic creation; it welcomes warmly the picture of life whose main characteristic is sympathetic narration. Other magazines in this group feel that they should publish only human interest stories as these make the strongest appeal to their particular circle of women readers.

Many of the stories in the farm and fireside journals are written with a distinct purpose; to portray intimately some heretofore little known section of the country; to illustrate some new agricultural theory; to create sympathy for some rural situation. But "purpose" is never allowed to destroy story values.

Our juvenile magazines make no secret of their aim. It is to influence rightly the changing character, the shifting ideals and aspirations of the growing boys and girls who come under the sway of their story pages. The fiction must be of absorbing interest from the point of view of the young, but at the same time it must contain nothing that would react detrimentally.

From the above brief summary it is easy to see that a story that might prove eminently acceptable from the point of view of one magazine might not do at all for

another. That the placing of a story, in other words, demands a certain amount of knowledge of market wants and market conditions. This brings us to the consideration of the agent. Is or is not an agent of help? This question is largely one for self-determination. It depends somewhat on the personality of the author. All agents cannot help all authors: there is a give and take of personality; in other words, the human equation has something to do with the success of the relationship. An agent cannot sell a story that is not sellable; an agent cannot repeatedly get higher prices for the author than the author can get for himself. An agent does know more of the markets and its fluctuations; agency advice—as it is a matter of business—is apt to be impersonal and good; agency direction can save much misguided effort.

There is an impression that agents are perhaps not popular with editors. This is not true. Perhaps the letter of James E. Tower, editor of *The Delineator* given herewith and which came unsolicited, is as good actual proof of this fact as any statement which the writer might make.

Dear Miss Wick:

A certain periodical, which has its distribution amongst writers, has put in my mouth words which I did not say and which do an injustice alike to some good friends of mine and to me.

I am quoted as having said, at a recent luncheon, that editors are not keen about purchasing from literary brokers. I never said that nor implied it. I said that I felt that the brokers had been the largest single factor in raising and maintaining authors' prices; that the publishing trade were inclined, on this account, to look askance at the agent system, but that authors formerly did not receive adequate compensation and that the better prices had raised the standard of authorship and benefited the trade, as well as the writers themselves.

My own editorial career is sufficient refutation of the statement attributed to me. I think I never heard an editor express any prejudice against the broker system.

Sincerely yours,

JAMES E. TOWER.

Lastly do not let it be felt that the compiler of these editorial want paragraphs, this editorial exposition of the

PREFATORY NOTE

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stories the editor wants and buys, desires to express any personal opinion as to the relative literary merits or commercial status of the magazines listed in this book. This is not a book of criticism. It is an effort to have the editors talk directly to those who for any reason whatever are interested in the American short story as it is published week in and week out in our magazines.

JEAN WICK.

NEW YORK CITY.

Ainslee's Magazine

THE WEEK-END GUEST

BY

MARIE VAN VORST

THE WEEK-END GUEST¹

By MARIE VAN VORST

FROM the room where Patricia Hereford's wedding gifts were displayed, the Long Island Sound was visible, and it lay in the distance on this October day, blue as a patch of cornflowers. Down at the dock the yacht waited to take the master of the house to town. Underneath the window in kilts, bare legs, bagpipes and all, a Highland shepherd, imported by the lady of the house from his native heather because he was picturesque, watched his sheep and was homesick to the bone! The twenty-five Southdown sheep were astoundingly clean and moved about in patches on the flawless lawn. Now and again the wretched piper played a few Scotch melodies as he was paid to do, and the lady of the house listened to the piper's tunes with her pencil on her lips as she prepared for the detective a list of the wedding presents.

"What melody is Sandy playing now, Nell?"

One of the bridesmaids, a girl who was staying in the house, perched nonchalantly on a table, a notebook and a pencil in her hands. Miss Moore was helping Mrs. Hereford list the wedding presents, and presumably Miss Cynthia Moore was thinking of her own wedding, when it should come to pass, as bridesmaids will! She dictated to Mrs. Hereford.

"Number one thousand and six, Nell, a pigskin purse from Eric Johnson. Pat's own chauffeur, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Hereford, "nice of him and in perfectly good taste."

Miss Moore swung to and fro a foot encased in a correct golf brogue. She was the champion woman golfer

¹ Copyright by *Ainslee's Magazine*.

of the Eastern States, and came downstairs in the morning dressed for golf, ready for her game. Indeed she said she only put on evening dress in order to keep out of social jail!

"That's the nicest thing I have heard you say about any of the presents, Nell! If people who sent them could only hear you!"

The lady of the house shrugged.

"I have always wondered why certain frightful things were manufactured and now I know they are for wedding gifts. The boring part is that over a thousand people will have to be lied to and thanked! Poor Patricia!"

There they were, over a thousand wedding presents! Patricia Hereford was a popular débutante and her father the best host on Long Island. Everything that indifferent taste could select and money pay for, from Hereford's own gift of diamonds to the modest pigskin purse, was here displayed. One of the most truly beautiful things was a pink Persian prayer rug of rich soft tones, a Persian proverb in delicate lettering running around the border. It hung on the wall opposite the pearls and valuable jewels. Two rooms on the second floor of the big country house had been consecrated to this exhibition, and the presents were to be seen by the guests on the following afternoon, after the wedding.

"Mr. Jones is downstairs in the fur room," Mrs. Hereford said, "but his men have not come up from Waybrook, and I thought he had better stay with the sables and the silver fox. We must not budge from here until they come, but you can go to Pat if you like, Cinnie. I'll stay on." The lady of the house glanced out at the Highland piper and his astoundingly clean sheep on the lawn.

"There!" exclaimed Miss Moore. "That's the tune I mean, Nell! What is it—do you know? Hear it and weep, don't you think so?"

Mrs. Hereford hummed the tune through, accompanied by the melancholic piper from without.

"Jolly!" exclaimed Cynthia from her table. "Jolly in your adorable voice! Are there any words that go with it or is it only a sob and a wail?"

"Ye Highlands and ye Lowlands oh! Where have you been?
They have slain the Earl of Moray and laid him on the green.
He was a braw gallant and he rode for the glove,
And the gallant Earl of Moray he was the Queen's love;
And long shall the Lady look from the Castle down
To hear the Earl of Moray go stounin' through the Town."

Mrs. Hereford's really beautiful voice filled the gift room with its sweetness.

"I'll catalogue wedding presents indefinitely," said Miss Moore, "if you'll go on like that. Anyhow, Nell, he is the Queen's Love all right!"

"What do you mean?" asked Mrs. Hereford sharply.

"Captain Ramsay. He is crazy about you."

Mrs. Hereford had been comparing her list with that of Miss Moore. She went over to the window, looked out until the red died from her face, and said over her shoulder:

"Go on with your list, Cinnie, and don't be a goose."

The girl wrote diligently for a few moments. Mrs. Hereford returned to the table where the pigskin purse reposed between the red lacquer box, on which the card read: "Maharajah of Singapore," and a sapphire ring on the other side.

"I am awfully sorry for you, Nell, you'll miss Pat beyond words, shan't you?"

"Yes," said the lady of the house, "to-morrow night I shall be utterly alone."

"How nice for your husband!" Miss Moore laughed. "Where is poor old Tommy going, anyway?"

"Nowhere," said the lady of the house coolly. "I mean *we* will be all alone."

Mrs. Hereford was twenty years younger than her husband. She had never asked herself so often before, how she was going to be able to entertain the prospect of endless luncheons and endless dinners opposite Tommy Hereford.

"Entirely alone," she murmured again, walking down the long line of presents. From the splendid pearls she came back to Eric Johnson's purse and stood near it as though something drew her to that special spot. She had not married Hereford to bring up his children, she

was only a little older than they. She had been a sister to them during the five years of her married life and Jack Hereford, who was unpopular with his father, adored his stepmother.

"Why did you marry your husband, Helen?" Cynthia Moore asked laughingly, but she did wonder with all her might. Since she had known the two she had never been able to understand the union.

Mrs. Hereford, leaning with one hand on the gift table, the other playing with her long rope of pearls, said absent-mindedly,

"Oh, there must be twenty reasons why!"

"And you can't think of one!" exclaimed the girl.

On the hard floor of the next room fell the footsteps of some one coming quickly toward them.

"Listen, Nell," laughed the girl who was staying in the house, "the Earl of Moray is stounin' through the town! You'll miss him, too, when he goes to-morrow! I am awfully sorry for him."

"Hello, Captain Ramsay!" she said. "Come and take my place and list these things with Mrs. Hereford." She held out the book and the pencil to him. She understood many things.

Since Ramsay had come to Waybrook ten days before with Jack Hereford, he had scarcely spoken a word to any one; scarcely looked at any one but the lady of the house, and his absorption in her was dangerously charming to a woman not in love with her husband.

"You don't have to stay in the house all morning, do you, Mrs. Hereford?" he asked eagerly. Ramsay wore the uniform of the Blank Flying Corps, and his breast was full of stars.

"Yes, Miss Moore and I are on guard here, and I wish you would do something for me, will you, like an angel?"

Ramsay mechanically picked up the pigskin purse.

"I have got one like this," he said, "it doesn't look like a wedding present! I have carried mine through the war and it is as empty now as it was then," he laughed.

"Please, please!" urged the lady of the house, "do run down to the graperies where we were yesterday——"

Ramsay interrupted.

"I wanted to go with you now, Mrs. Hereford, down there; can't we?"

"I am on guard. If anything were stolen from this room, Cynthia and I would be responsible. I am making up a lunch basket for Patricia. She is crazy about Hamburg grapes and I want to put some in."

"You only want to send me away," he laughed. "I never went on so many distant errands in my life! Isn't there something you want in New York?"

"I do want the grapes!"

She wanted to get him from under the clever scrutiny of Cynthia Moore, and after he had gone out of the room, reluctant in every move of his body, Miss Moore asked, "What do you know about Captain Ramsay?"

The bridesmaid had a fashion of putting questions when she was interested in anything with a frank abruptness, at once alluring and embarrassing.

"Not much, just picturesque things," said the lady of the house. "There's the last item, Cinnie, diamond pendant, value four thousand dollars."

Cynthia Moore scrutinized her list. "All right! We have varied it agreeably! We began with 'gift of the bridegroom, one hundred thousand dollars,' and we drift along to a pigskin purse, value one dollar fifty, I should say, and close with a medium note, a little four thousand! Tell me about Ramsay."

Miss Moore had arrived the day before, coming back with the Herefords from the races, to a large house party of which Jack Hereford, son of the house, home from France, and Captain Ralph Ramsay were part.

"Jack's crazy about him," said Mrs. Hereford. "He is Jack's best friend."

"M!" murmured Miss Moore. "Excuse me, my dear! You have a soft spot in your heart for Jack. I don't understand it—I never have."

Mrs. Hereford went on.

"They have been together for two years in France in the same sector. Captain Ramsay is an ace with a ripping record, as you know."

"No," returned the bridesmaid, giving her book up to Mrs. Hereford, "I don't know anything about him."

Miss Moore was an unusually understanding young person; some people said she had ten senses where others have only seven.

"Well!" said the lady of the house. "He is quite poor; lots of nice people are. He is from the West as you can hear by his accent."

"No one has a chance to hear much of his accent but you! He never speaks to any one else."

"Ridiculous!" said the lady of the house. "Jack told me that every one in the sector from the mascot to the colonel was crazy about Ralph, and as you see, he has all the medals that can be won."

"Too bad he couldn't have worked off a few on Jack," said Cynthia. "Jack is as bare as a bone, and his father seems to have it in for him harder than ever! What has Jack done since he was demobilized, Nell?"

Mrs. Hereford shook her head.

"Don't ask me! My husband doesn't like my interference. I learned that and I don't try to know. Jack is going to California to-morrow. He is going on with aviation, and I hope will go into the United States army for good. I *hope* he will."

"Too bad!" murmured Miss Moore. For in her kind and understanding heart there was a very warm place for the master of the house. "Too bad such a fine man as Tommy should have a son like Jack."

"You are very unfair to him," said the lady of the house warmly. "I think I am the only one to understand him. I believe the very best of Jack, and I know he'll come out all right. He has a good military record over there."

Miss Moore laughed. "Well, he did not get shot in the back! I know I'm rotten, but—" She came impulsively over to her friend and put her arms around her. "Now the Earl of Moray is another thing. *He's* all right. You can see his record on his face and on his breast, and I excuse his 'stounin' through the town' and his entire absorption in another woman—he is all right!"

Cynthia Moore kissed Mrs. Hereford and then went

upstairs to Patricia, who had been waiting for her for the last half hour. The lady of the house was not sorry to be alone.

She knew about Ralph Ramsay only what her stepson had told her in his letters from France during the past two years. In these letters Ralph Ramsay had been described as a "wonder, a corker, a dare-devil in the air, a chap who defied danger and death, a little bit of all right," and when Jack took the trouble to detail some thrilling event or to tell of fine achievements, Ralph Ramsay would turn out to be the man who had done the thing. In Jack's letters the ace had charmed this imaginative and loveless woman, and his valor and his courage had fascinated her from afar. In her room, on her bureau and on her desk, were numerous snapshots of the two young men, and the ace seemed always to be smiling at her and to be the expression of *la joie de vivre*. He attracted her enormously, and in the little pictures she grew to know every line of his slim body and of his beautiful head. As he waved his cap at the side of a broken machine from which he had landed that time safely, he seemed to wave to her and to greet her.

When her husband came into her little room, if he resented the fact that there were no pictures of himself there and too many of his scapegrace of a son, his good breeding did not allow him to comment on the fact! He showed a friendly approval of Captain Ramsay, however.

"Now there is a fine-looking chap, Nell, and I hope to God he does Jack good. I'd like a son like that!"

But he saw the flying man under different colors when Ramsay appeared at Waybrook. Ramsay came into a conventional atmosphere with a vivid charm of which no one was unconscious, and if Jack had written that from the mascot to the colonel he was popular in France—he was popular at Waybrook, from the chauffeur by whose side he had sat on the way from the train, to the lady of the house. Not even the big wedding with the rush, excitement, and absorption had been able to cloud over the brightness of the passing of Ralph Ramsay. If he defied danger in the air, the young man defied convention here;

and with utter disregard of propriety he fell in love with the lady of the house and took no pains to conceal his passion. Mrs. Hereford remembered what her stepson had said of him: "Women go crazy about Ralph. In the hospital he had the nurses nailed. It was comic, the poor chaps on either side of him stood no chance at all!"

Tommy Hereford, the best host on Long Island, had on this occasion displayed a perfect hospitality! For ten days he watched this young man make love to his wife and did not throw him out! Hereford sincerely loved his wife, and was determined to win her if he could. He had no intention of playing the losing game of a jealous husband.

The day before, to protect Ramsay and to get him away where she could warn him, and try to make him behave, she had snatched half an hour from the rushing day and taken him to the graperies. He had drawn her into his arms and held her in spite of the fact that the gardener was in the next glass house and talking across to Mrs. Hereford. Ramsay had said over the man's voice and over the scent of violets:

"I love you terribly—with every bit of me—thank God I was not smashed up in France before I could tell you this!"

Now she knew he would think of every moment of this. She could never go into those graperies again without a thrill. Her husband was going to town on the yacht and came in smoking and holding out two *one-thousand-dollar* bills.

"Nell, I want Patricia to have some pocket money in her dressing case. Slip these in, will you?"

"Tommy," exclaimed his wife, "you never stop, do you?"

"I am glad I don't *have* to stop," said the father, "when it is the case of doing something for my little girl."

"I'll put them in this little leather purse," said Mrs. Hereford and she took up the little pocketbook. "Pat says she is going to take it with her, Tommy, and she'll be frightfully pleased."

He gave her the bills, and Mrs. Hereford slipped them into the little purse.

"Going to leave it there around loose like that?" asked the business man.

"Why not? Jones' men will be here in a minute. Think of the things farther along and what they are worth. There is no one here but ourselves."

Through the other doorway Jack Hereford and Ralph Ramsay came in together. Since he had been at Waybrook, Ramsay had never seen the husband and wife alone together. He stopped short on the threshold, but the son went in.

"I've not been robbing the graperies," Ramsay said. "These are going in your daughter's lunch basket, Mr. Hereford."

"I dare say," nodded the father. "Everything goes with Pat!"

"Look what dad has just given her." Mrs. Hereford held up the purse and the bills. "I am putting them in this little pigskin purse so that if she wants to buy some stamps she'll find them handy."

Jack looked at his father's last generous gift without a word, turned about and went and stood at the window. The piper, who felt he had done as much as his salary demanded, was silent. With his back to the house he gazed beyond the Sound toward the bonnie hills of Scotland. Ramsay seemed to appreciate the generosity, however.

"Wonderful!" he exclaimed. "Wonderful to be able to do things like that for one's children!"

And he looked from the husband to the wife, but his tone was bitter. Mrs. Hereford had never heard a note like this in his voice. As her husband went out of the room and his son slowly followed him, Mrs. Hereford asked Ramsay:

"Why did you speak so bitterly when my husband gave Patricia his parting gift? It was not like you!"

"Bitterly!" he exclaimed. "My dad threw me out when I was twelve—he married again—I wasn't wanted, and since then I have never known a home. I have knocked about the world. I have never seen a family life and when Jack used to talk of his people I never believed that

anything like this existed! And now that I see what it means to a chap, it makes me bitter, that's all!"

"Poor boy!"

"Oh, no! Oh, no," he hurried. "For God's sake, don't pity me! I don't want to grouch. I have been hungry, I have always been poor, but I've managed to get something of life everywhere! I suppose you'd call me an adventurer."

He threw back his beautiful head and laughed.

"It is a good adventure all right and I am glad I am part of it."

He took her hand, looked down at her with his wonderful frank smile, and with the courage that conquers the world.

"I am glad that all those hard paths have brought me here to you. I have seen a lot of women, but I never cared like this."

She believed it and he kissed her again deeply, deeply, many times; indifferent to the fact that they might be observed, and how serious it would be for her; but she freed herself saying:

"What madness! This must have its end, you know!"

And he murmured passionately, "Yes, it must have its end, dearest. When can I see you?"

"To-night," she said, "in the music room at twelve—at half past twelve."

Unmistakably some one was coming in the hall. Mrs. Hereford turned and hurriedly left the room.

After she had gone out Ramsay stood motionless beside the long tables. Life, which had been so full of unkindness to him and so full of caprices, seemed at last to have smiled upon him. Only certain moments in the air when above the German lines he had escaped the enemy's barrage and later brought down his black foe—seen him fall, only in moments of such magnitude, had he felt lifted as high as to-day.

Here some one called:

"Nell! Nell, where are you?"

And down through the long room, next where his own eager footsteps had gone "stounin'" on the parquet floor,

came Patricia Hereford, the bride, in her wedding dress, looking for her stepmother. She stood hesitatingly on the threshold between the rooms.

"Where's mother, Captain Ramsay?"

Patricia passed for a beauty. She was happy and healthy, lit by young expectancy and young hope and love. White as a lily, and tall as a lily, she stood looking about at her beautiful things as a child might at his Christmas gifts.

"What a crowd of things!" she murmured. "What an awful lot, isn't it? And all for little me." She nodded and laughed. "It will take a thousand years to write letters of thanks for them all. I'll make Nelly do it."

She slowly walked along in front of the presents, lifting a card here, stopping a moment there, only half attentive, half seeing them, having this day more dazzling things than material jewels to think about. She stopped finally, before the pigskin purse lying between the sapphire ring and the lacquer box. The young man who had been thrown out of family life at twelve to fight for his existence, watched this spoiled society girl in her satin dress, surrounded by objects whose value footed up to hundreds of thousands.

"I have not *half* seen the things yet! Aren't they wonderful?"

She picked up the purse.

"This is from my chauffeur. Wasn't it kind of him?"

She opened it mechanically, looked up at Ramsay, and said, laughing:

"Oh, gracious! That's daddy!"

"It was meant for a surprise for you."

"Never mind," she said, "I won't tell. Indeed, if any one asks, I'll swear it was empty." She laughed and put it down again.

"It is great of you, Captain Ramsay, to have watched the presents for me. Thank you a thousand times."

Ramsay looked up at the prayer rug.

"I wish since you are here, Miss Hereford, you'd tell me what the letters around this prayer rug mean! What do they say?"

She thought a minute.

"I have got it written out upstairs somewhere."

It was difficult for the bride to bring her attention to Persian characters.

"As near as I can remember they say:

"To the Great Lover Honor and Dishonor Life and Death are in the hands of the Beloved."

Ramsay nodded. "Great!" he said. "I like it awfully. It's ripping."

"Hello, Pat!" Her brother stood on the threshold she had crossed. "Hello, people! I have been looking for you, Pat. I have been up to your room."

The two young people, absorbed in a saying of the Far East, did not answer. Patricia and Ralph stood with their backs to the sapphire ring and the maharajah's red lacquer box and the pigskin purse.

"The Maharajah of Singapore," said Miss Hereford, "gave me wonderful lessons last year in Boston. All the girls were crazy about him. You read from left to right." She pointed with her slender finger of the left hand on which the wedding ring would be very soon. "There like that, see:

"'To the Great Lover Honor and Dishonor' on the first line; 'Life and Death are in the hands of the Beloved' on the second line."

The Scotch piper without, on the flawless lawn with his twenty-five astoundingly clean sheep, had decided to take his grazing herd farther along and had gone to the end of the park. From the distance they could hear the tune of his melancholic music as it came to them faintly as they stood there reading the rug.

"And the gallant Earl of Moray he was the queen's love."

"The Great Lover," Ramsay repeated the words; they were fascinating. Oh, it was worth while in life to be a great lover! Ah, he could be it now for her—for her—for the woman he had kissed and held in his arms!

"Mr. Rolland would like to speak to Miss Hereford in her room."

No one but the family was allowed in the gift room and the footman with a message for Patricia from the bridegroom stopped halfway down the next room, and even though she was so near being Mrs. Rolland, the girl blushed at the name and started forward.

"I'll come at once. Captain Ramsay, do find Nell. Ask her to come up to my room. I must see her."

"I can't leave here," said Ramsay. "Jack will tell her. I say, old man—" And he turned round to speak to Jack, but Hereford had simply crossed the room and gone out by the other door.

As Mrs. Hereford, after leaving Ramsay, went out of the gift room she ran into young Hereford, who caught her arm and drew her toward her own room.

"Nell, come along with me a second, will you?"

Her stepchildren called her by her first name. She was more like a sister than a mother to them. She was always dreading demands of money from Jack, for whenever he wanted either to confess to her or to demand a favor, he made her boudoir a confessional.

Mrs. Hereford was a Southerner, accustomed to a great deal of admiration from young men, and Jack Hereford was especially chivalrous and devoted to her. He might well be, for she had been his defender against his father more than once. Now he put her in a comfortable chair and called in to her maid, who happened to be in the next room.

"Marie, like an angel fetch a couple of cocktails for Mrs. Hereford and me, will you?"

"You should rest, Nell; you've been worn out with all this rush."

When he had made his stepmother comfortable, he lit a cigarette for her, took one himself, and looked around at the photographs of himself and Ramsay.

"Gee, what a lot of me! You framed everything I ever sent you, I guess. Isn't Ralph a corker? Now he's got the good luck to be staying on. I've brought you here, Nell, to say good-by. I've got to go to-day."

She looked at him in surprise.

"You mean to say you are going to miss the wedding?"

"I am awfully cut up about it—military orders, and—honestly, I'm not sorry to get away. Dad has been rotten to me—absolutely rotten!"

The maid brought the two cocktails on a tray. Jack drank his and said half smiling:

"You're a brick, Nell. Ralph will bring me news of everything when he comes. Good-by—don't get too tired. See you at Christmas." He leaned over, kissed her, and went to bid his sister good-by.

The lady of the house, while alone in her room the next few moments, received countless telephone calls and messages. As soon as they knew she was to be found every one came to her. Only after she had dismissed the last messenger could she draw a long breath and remember Ralph in the room beyond.

Ramsay had become a great excitement and a problem. To-morrow he would be gone, however, and to-night she would try to put things on another footing, and in his absence turn to the occupations of her busy social life to try to forget him.

As she passed through the apartment adjoining the gift room, she could see the tables weighed down with their priceless things, and Ralph still alone in front of the maharajah's lacquer box and the sapphire ring opposite the prayer rug on the wall. She could see, too, that in his hands *was the little purse; he was closing it—slipping the strap under the band.* He put it quickly down as he heard her steps and came toward her with a radiant face as though he had no thought beyond the fact that she had come back and alone. She had time only to meet his eyes with a troubled question in her own, for, sharp and alert, Mr. Jones, with one of the other detectives, followed behind her. The three together entered the room where Ramsay stood. Jones said briskly:

"Now, we'll take charge here, Mrs. Hereford, and relieve you, Captain Ramsay."

But the young man paid no more attention to them than if they had been ghosts. He was looking only at the woman whom he had taken lately in his arms.

"Since you went away I have learned to read the writing on the wall."

She did not answer. She was not thinking of Persian characters and Persian rugs.

"Miss Hereford came in her wedding gown. She was looking for you and she read me the writing on the wall."

"I have forgotten what it says."

At the far end of the big room Jones and his man were comparing the lists and checking them.

"I saw Miss Hereford, too," said Jones. "She came to the fur room to tell me about the little pigskin purse with loose cash—two thousand dollars! I told Miss Hereford it was a mistake to let loose cash like that lie around."

And the detective took up the little pocketbook, undid the strap which Mrs. Hereford had just seen Ramsay close. Jones was perfunctory, and he looked into the little purse out of habit. Finding it empty, he held it over to Mrs. Hereford and Ramsay, saying:

"Empty as a drum."

Jones was delighted. He was glad of the snappy little incident, and his man, at the other end of the room, turned round with alacrity at his chief's voice. Captain Ramsay, his hands in his pockets, stood perfectly motionless, looking quietly at the lady of the house. Before he could speak she said:

"Miss Hereford is very careless, and how could she possibly exchange two thousand-dollar bills on her honeymoon? I thought as you did, Mr. Jones, and I told her father before he went to town I had a lot of large bills to pay on the place and I wanted some cash. Mr. Hereford asked me to slip in my own check instead. I left it out on my desk in my boudoir. I'll go and fetch it now."

There was nothing whatsoever to say to the lady of the house—it was perfectly *en règle*.

"All right," said Jones. "We'll list it properly and it will be much safer."

As the lady of the house went out the detective said to Captain Ramsay:

"Now if you want to go off duty?"

The young man even then looked at nothing but the disappearing figure of Helen Hereford. He stared at it as if he wanted to follow her, then wheeled about and went out by the opposite door. He called out to Jones:

"I am going to have a bit of air before luncheon."

How that day passed she never knew. She had gone to Patricia and kissed her under her wedding veil, and there had been the bustle in the busy house—countless things to be done, to be decided—endless messages and calls. No one saw Captain Ramsay or knew where he had gone and, at dinner, when the host asked for him, a manservant answered:

"Captain Ramsay was called over the phone by a brother officer and has gone to the club. He has taken his traps."

"Après la guerre comme à la guerre!" said Cynthia Moore. "Manners! That's the Earl of Moray all over!" And she made a grimace at Mrs. Hereford as much as to say: "You packed him off at last, and no wonder."

He had simply fled, and the shame and the degradation sickened her to the soul. He had not given her time to recover from his passionate declarations before he had stolen under her very eyes, one might say, under her very kisses. How had he dared to touch her? How *had* he dared?

By dinner time she was so overcome by her wretchedness that she was obliged to go to her boudoir to shut herself away. As she saw him on the little photograph by the side of his machine, ready to ascend—and in another near the broken wing of a fallen plane after an accident, she thought:

"Far better to have died than to have come back to this! What must this day have been for him?" All day she disputed with herself, loathing herself one moment, believing him innocent the next.

Her husband had come out to Waybrook early. He, as well as Cynthia Moore, thought that Mrs. Hereford had sent the young man away. Hereford came in to his wife's room just before dinner.

"I'll be glad when all this is over and you can rest."

She looked at him gratefully. He seemed so true and honorable. She turned away that he might not see her tears.

"I am dog tired, Tommy, and I'll be glad, too, when it's all over."

Mrs. Hereford was a true musician, and her husband loved her talent. When she came to Waybrook after her marriage she found the beautiful music room he had created waiting for her. Hereford had copied it from a villa near Cremona in Italy. The woodwork lining the walls had been brought to this American house from a music room whose traditions were hundreds of years old. Besides modern instruments—a phonograph, a harp, and two grand pianos looking at each other from the opposite ends of the room—rare instruments hung on the walls. Before the windows leading out on the porches, fell curtains of Renaissance brocade. The room was rich in tone and full of shadow and charm. The lady of the house had seen Captain Ramsay alone in this room for the first time one evening when a guest in the smoking room beyond had been telling a ghost story.

She and Captain Ramsay had played "Manon," "Butterfly," and Irish songs to make a thrilling accompaniment for a thrilling tale, but more sincerely to cover what Ramsay was saying to her in his young, eager voice with his young, eager feelings.

As Helen Hereford now came quickly in the music room past midnight she found it was still as death and it seemed to her as nearly ominous.

She walked softly over the thick rugs. The black paneling of the walls made a striking background for her figure in white evening dress. From one of the windows through which streamed October moonlight, the curtains were drawn; and the night, suggesting only beauty and peace, did not seem a proper setting for the story of a crime. During the war she had often stood in this window thinking of Jack Hereford and his friend flying over the enemy's lines. She had looked forward with interest to seeing and knowing this brave man. How little she had imagined there would ever be a moment like this!

How cruel Ralph's need of money must have been in order to have brought him so low as this! Jack had told her that Ramsay was as poor as a rat—with never a cent in his pocket—but Ralph himself had told her more that very afternoon when she had seen in the bitterness on his face a record of his cruel life.

Then he had acknowledged being a castaway and a vagabond. Had he not called himself an adventurer? The fact that he had rushed out of the house was against him. She did not believe that he would come here, and if he did not, she would keep his miserable secret as she would keep secret his kisses which she could not efface.

At the sound of steps on the veranda she went hurriedly to the window to open it herself. As she turned the handle of the French window, Ramsay came in, dressed just as he was when he had gone out that morning to fetch the grapes, in white flannel and white shoes. Her first expression was maternal as she saw him.

"You will catch a terrible cold. You must be frightfully cold! I am going to fetch you something to drink. There is whisky in the smoking room."

Ramsay's face was white and drawn. He came out in the room only a little beyond the window, his back against the red and gold Renaissance curtain. It framed him with its long lines falling behind him. He seemed to stand between in the folds.

"Please!" he said. "Don't get me anything."

He might have been embroidered on the satin of the curtains. He was moveless and beautiful in his pallor and silence; nevertheless he was only a modern figure, a modern man.

"How could you? How could you?" she breathed. "I did not think you would come to-night and yet I hoped you would"—and she felt her voice desert her—"and explain."

He repeated the word "explain" with a laugh.

"I came back because I wanted to see you—for no other reason."

She interrupted him with a passionate gesture as though she would dismiss her memories and his.

"To see *me* again! *What* can this matter?" In spite of herself she cried, "How horrible! How horrible!" and she covered her face.

He understood that she hated herself because he had taken her in his arms. He looked quietly at her from his greater height, and his expression did not indicate that all day he had been wandering like a hunted animal.

"This is the most dreadful thing that has ever come into my life! Oh! Why *did* you come back?" she cried.

"To see you—just to see you."

There was a silence between them for a second, and the clock in the hall outside struck one. Ramsay said:

"You are sick with disgust. You are full of regret at—*our love*."

"You think of that first! You think of that first of all!"

"First—second—last and above everything."

"After what I saw this morning every word like that is an insult," Mrs. Hereford said.

Ramsay came forward and caught her hands, saying tensely:

"And the look I saw on your face to-day when you came in the gift room? You use the word insult. What was the look I saw on your face when you came into the room?"

She murmured: "Explain, you must explain, you *must*!"

He let her hands fall.

"I have nothing to explain."

"You knew I was poor. A poor man has debts—gambling debts perhaps. Then there are women in men's lives who make dreadful scandals—there is blackmail. A chap does things in desperation and is not all bad. I have known men to do such things. But from the moment I saw that look on your face to-day, the look which said you thought I was a thief, the world stopped for me." He threw back his head and gave a little laugh. "It will never go on as it was before."

Here she put out her hand as if about to take his, but let it fall.

"I've nothing to explain. The fact that for the tenth

of a second you believed me a thief makes everything else of no value. Of course now"—there was a break in his voice—"you don't even believe in my love!" His voice was low, but there was a ring in it that she never forgot. "It doesn't make any difference any more. I've tramped with that horror all day.

"Ever since I was a kid I have had a hard time. I have gone to all lengths in time of stress. I have been in all parts of the globe after adventures, but this is the saddest adventure of them all. My heart stopped when I saw that look on your face."

He stood straight as an arrow, fine as a lance; his figure once more was immovable against the curtain, and he looked like the picture up in her room, but the smile was gone.

"My things are all in the station. Before your clock strikes again I shall be gone. Think of me as you will, but you can't believe that I did not love you. *That you can't believe!*"

She would have given much to think him innocent. She covered her face with her hands, murmuring:

"*Oh—you better just go—you better just go.*"

He looked around the dark, paneled room where the shadows gathered like ghosts ready, when he should go, to haunt Waybrook; and as she stood with her hands across her eyes, he took her in his arms and kissed her upon her hair, upon the hand covering her eyes, and upon her lips. He opened the window and she heard him say, "Good-by! Good-by!" and only stirred when she felt the cold night air rushing in upon her.

She found herself clinging to the curtain, her face buried in its folds. She might have been a night moth blown there as she clung and shook, the heavy curtain wrapping her round. Ramsay had drawn her toward the window as if he wanted to take her with him into a world which had treated him not any too well! She came to herself as the clock struck, realizing that she was part of a household whose conventions would not stand for the lady of the house wandering about at dawn through the lower rooms without excuse!

She passed her hands over her face to wipe away not the kisses of an hour before, but the marks of tears; and drew the curtains to shut out with the moonlight the figure of the man who had disappeared into the night. Then she left the music room, intending to go upstairs. She remembered what Cynthia Moore had said that morning about the Earl of Moray and the line of the Persian proverb: "Honor and Dishonor are in the hands of the Beloved."

On the first step of the staircase she stopped to look toward the smoking room at the far end of the hall, and she saw a line of light under the doorway. Her first thought was that Ramsay had hidden there, and as she crossed the hall she realized that she wanted him to be there—*she wanted him to be there!*

In one of the entirely comfortable chairs, his hand shading his eyes, an open book on his knee, unconscious of midnight rendezvous, her husband was sitting. He turned round and rose as his wife came in, and she saw, although grave and stern, he was impersonal as far as *she* was concerned.

"Hello, Nell! Couldn't sleep, just as I couldn't, I suppose?"

She wondered if it was possible that he had heard her in the music room at the end of the hall.

She came over to him.

"Two o'clock, Tommy; terribly late!"

Hereford drew over the other big chair.

"Since you are up, Nell, sit out a bit longer with me, will you?"

He would think she had been weeping at losing Patricia, no doubt imagine that she had come directly from Patricia's room. He said:

"The little girl *will* leave an empty place and we are going to be awfully lonely. We'll have to go on a new honeymoon trip, Nell!"

Mrs. Hereford sank down in her chair and tried to smile.

"Have you been mourning here all the evening for Patricia, Tommy?"

"No, only been down about half an hour."

He smoked without looking at her, and again she wondered whether it were possible that he knew she had been in the other room with Ralph.

"I've been in the music room for some time. It was full of memories of our jolly times, of dances, of Patricia's coming-out ball."

But Hereford did not appear to have heard what she said. His face had settled into the harsh gravity and look of displeasure that she always connected with his son.

"What is the matter, Tommy, tell me?"

"The old story—Jack!"

Mrs. Hereford, with a breath of keen relief, put her hand on his knees, and sat back in her chair.

"Poor Tommy! It must be something perfectly terrible for you to look as you look and to sit here like this half the night."

"It is the worst."

"What is it? Tell me."

"Blackmail!"

And clear as ice came to her the remembrance of Ramsay's words: "*There are women in men's lives who make dreadful scandals for them. There is blackmail—*"

"It is a relief to speak to you, Nell. When Jack was at Cambridge he got mixed up with the worst kind of woman and made some sort of marriage with her. Drunk, of course. She has trailed him ever since, followed him even to France; been bleeding him to death. The money you and I have given him has gone to her. He's been keeping her quiet until now. He told me this last night, here in this room, and he asked for money to shut her up, as she threatened on Patricia's wedding day to give out a flashy story to the newspapers and drag us all in."

Mrs. Hereford never stirred.

"I fairly kicked him out of the house," her husband said. He heard her ask:

"But you refused to give him money?"

"Yes, and I told him all the newspapers in the United States could print his story if they liked. It was his own life!"

Mrs. Hereford half rose, murmuring:

"Oh, and he needed money like *that!* Tommy, like *that*, and you didn't give it to him?"

"I told him if he went to you or Patricia I would disinherit him. I told him to get his lawyer. It was up to him. If you begin to give to blackmail you are lost. Let him take what is coming to him—he has made his own life!"

She gave a cry, sank more deeply into her chair, and burst into tears, her head on the arm of the chair. Her husband bent over, reassuring her, telling her not to worry; Jack would get a lawyer and he had been a brute to tell her when she was so utterly done up and tired.

But she had broken down under the strain of fatigue, emotion, and passion greater, at last, than her control.

She tried to pull herself together, to control her grief. She would wire Ramsay to-morrow, she would ask his pardon. To her now it was clear as day. Oh, it was clear! But Ralph would never forgive her—never in the world. She heard her husband go over to a little cupboard in the wall where drinks were kept; she heard the snap of the soda-bottle cork like a little shot.

There was nothing she could say to her husband. Her passion for Ramsay had protected his son. Hereford would never know anything of the theft or anything of her false suspicion.

"Honor and dishonor had been in her hands!"

Her husband came back with a refreshing drink for her, and sat down on the arm of the chair, made her swallow it, and then he drew her up with great gentleness.

"It is nearly morning," he said, "and we have a busy day before us. Brace up, old girl!" He kissed her on her hair.

Mrs. Hereford looked up at him through her tears. First of all, her husband's honor had been given to her for keeping. How ruthlessly she had torn it and thrown it away!

Hereford put his arm around her. She needed his support, and they went out, side by side, past the music room, where the ghostly shadows gathered in the four corners, only waiting to take possession.

The American Magazine

**THE TERRIBLE CHARGE AGAINST
JEFF POTTER**

BY

SAMUEL A. DERIEUX

THE TERRIBLE CHARGE AGAINST JEFF POTTER ¹

By SAMUEL A. DERIEUX

IT was Saturday night and raining hard when Frank Blainey pushed through the group of farmers gathered about Jeff Potter and ordered the old man out of the store. There were three indictments according to Frank's angry arraignment: First, that old Jeff hadn't spent twenty dollars in the store in the last two years; second, that he tracked in mud and whittled shavings on the floor; and, third, that women didn't like he was.

As for the first, well, old Jeff didn't have much money to spend, and consequently didn't spend it; as for the second, having no women at home, and putting in a good share of his time in the river swamp, Jeff wasn't as careful about mud and shavings as he might have been; as for the third—that started him stuttering so he could hardly get the question out.

"W-w-what women?"

It was Frank Blainey who flushed now, but he went on. He was a lanky young fellow, his face a bit narrow, his eyes set a trifle close together. Having started the row he was just the kind of man to see it through, especially where Jeff was concerned, for who minded old Jeff Potter?

"It don't make any difference what women!" he cried, face white now, eyes blazing. "I don't want to argue this case and I don't propose to. This is my store, and I tell you to get out and stay out. That's all I've got to say, and all I'm going to say!"

Then old Jeff went crazy, saw red. You see, it was all so sudden. For twenty years he had been loafing in

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here—ever since his wife died. This had been his place when Sam Blainey, father of Frank, was alive and ran the store. Here, with a twinkle in his eyes, he had slipped, secretly, many a stick of candy, yellow candy with red stripes, to the youngsters who stood about while parents shopped. Here, out of the soft pine of dry-goods boxes, he had carved many an Indian, while the children crowded about, then gone out in the woods, children following, and colored the Indians red with poke-berry juice. Here, at nights, he had told those bigger children, the fathers, about where fish were biting now in the river, about how wild turkeys were moving from one section of the swamp to another, about the best kind of caller to get them in range. For that was the only kind of thing old Jeff knew, except that children loved candy and carved Indians, and that in a general way folks ought to tote fair with one another.

But to come back—it was all sudden and Jeff saw red. Bill Carson, a farmer, burly and powerful, grabbed him and shoved him back. He wouldn't have had any show, anyway, with Frank Blainey. His old heart was far stouter than his biceps. All this Bill Carson knew.

"Come on, Jeff," he was saying. "Yes, that's all right now, you come with me. We'll talk about it out here in the road."

And so it was that Jeff found himself out in the road, with the rain beating in his face, and Bill Carson towering above him.

"Let me go, Bill," he was pleading. "Let me go back an' smash his face. Just once, Bill, just once. That wife of hisn is the 'women' he's talkin' about. I know, Bill. Once in the ol' days, when Sam Blainey was livin' an' runnin' the sto', befo' her an' Frank married, she come in. I didn't know there was any lady aroun', an' I said 'damn' or somethin'. She heerd me an' went out, head high, an' said she never would come back agin. She tol' all the women about what I had said. She's pizen pious, Bill; you know her. She brought hit up in the ladies' missionary society—said there was heathens livin' right around 'em. Meanin' me. Bill, listen, let me go back!"

"No," said Carson, "you better go home now, Jeff. He'll be sorry he done it."

"He'll be enough sight sorrier if I smash his face! Who is he, anyhow? A scrub pup from his fine ol' daddy's breed! He was fired from college—for cheatin', too. He's a sneak now. You know as well as me that ever' Saturday he sends that wife of hisn to visit her folks across the river, then sneaks off to town hisself an' has a good time on the sly. Only las' Sunday, when that poker club in town was pulled, he was one of the men they caught. Oh, he hushed it up, him an' his town friends, but he was one. I know, Bill. Jim Ryan, he's my friend, he's one of the cops that done it. He come out here to hunt with me las' Tuesday, an' he tol' me about it. I never opened my mouth about it to nobody—I never would have, either. But let me go now, an' I'll face him with it. I'll tell him—"

"No, no," said Carson kindly, with the indulgence of the strong. "There's a woman in there, Sam Raine's wife. You don't want to raise a row befo' her, do you? You'll be justifyin' what Frank said. Go on home now, ol' man, an' go to bed."

And in humiliation and sorrow old Jeff went—went because there wasn't anything else for him to do. Anger is a violent intoxicant: you forget your troubles while the rage lasts, you do not care for past or future. Old Jeff Potter would have been happier this night if he could have stayed angry.

But sitting late into the night by the smoky lamp on the table, he had forgotten his anger, he had forgotten everything except that he couldn't go to the store any more. He had loved it in the old days when Sam Blainey, dead now, ran it, and the lazier men of a lazier era gathered around the rusty, pot-bellied stove. Then he had come to love the new régime, after Frank painted the store all over inside and out; he had loved the bright acetylene lights and the shiny new base-burner, and the Saturday night crowds. He didn't ask much of life, he never had—just a roof over his head, a place to hunt, a store to loaf in,

where he could see men and women and children and hear them talk. And now one of these, the one that was growing dearer as he grew older, had been taken away.

For a moment the old man's helpless anger flared up like an echo.

"I ought to have smashed his face!" he muttered.

But when he rose and fumbled about on the mantelpiece, among bits of soft pine and half carved Indians, for his pipe, his hands were trembling, and so was the match he held to the bowl; while outside the rain, ever increasing, splashed from the eaves and dashed against the window, as if his cabin were some sub-sea shelter in the midst of a roaring ocean.

It was this continued deluge that waked him up two hours later with the thought that the river would rise and with the fear that the herd of blooded cattle ranging in the swamp—the cattle belonging to Squire Kirby, his landlord—would drown. It brought him thumping suddenly out of bed and made him light the lamp. Twelve, declared the hands of a gingerbread clock on the mantel.

"I better see about them cattle," he said.

Now, tending cattle wasn't part of his contract with Squire Kirby. A bale of cotton a year rent for the little farm he lived on *was*. But the bale was seldom forthcoming. It was such a long way to the end of a cotton row, and what excitement was there waiting for you when you got there? You just had to turn round and hoe to the end of another row.

"All right," Kirby had said, over and over; "if you can't pay, you can't, Jeff. You just bring me an Injun or two to send to my grandchildren for Christmas an' we'll call it squar'."

So the Indian or two, or half a dozen of them, had come to be his rent. For the rest, he did look after the cattle whenever he happened to be in the swamp, and Kirby always had the pick of his string of fish and bag of game.

Now, listening shrewdly to the ever-increasing rain, he dressed and picked up his lantern. Then he blew out the lamp and plunged into the storm. Bent double against wind and rain, lantern unlighted, because he loved

to find his way in the dark, he hurried across the field. Just before he reached the main road he stopped. Along that road splashed three or four negroes, a lantern between them.

"Dat you, Mr. Jeff Potter?" one of them called.

But he did not answer. They were Kirby's hands; they might want to go with him; they would be more trouble than they were worth; he would have to be pulling them, instead of cattle, out of the swamp before he got through. They hesitated a moment, then went on, mumbling to one another. Old Jeff grinned.

"When they git home," he chuckled, "they'll be tellin' folks they seen a ha'nt."

An eighth of a mile before he came to Blainey's store he turned off into a narrow wood road seldom used. He could see pretty well in the dark, old Jeff could, but he wasn't looking for anything like this—he almost ran into the car that stood there in the road!

He lit his lantern now and glanced all around. There was no one in the streaming woods. He went to the car, pulled aside the curtains that were fastened down, and peered in. The seats were empty. All excited, he went back to the rear and squatted down. The lantern light shone on the number and lettering of the license. It was a city car. He got out of his inside breastpocket a frazzled notebook, a sort of diary, in which he jotted down bits of wood lore and queer things he saw as he went about. From inside the leaves he took a stub pencil, and set down the number of that car, and the date on which he had seen it.

After he had gone away he looked back. There it was, big and long and silent. He hurried along through the thicket, across the field, and into the big woods of the swamp. Yes, the river was up. The lantern glistened on water where no water ought to be. Into it he splashed, up to his ankles, up to his knees, the trunks of trees coming forward toward him, then slipping back in silent procession, the shadows cast by the lantern darting here and there in the flooded woods, or moving about like enormous black clubs above his head.

He was thoroughly alarmed now—alarmed for Kirby's cattle. A mile ahead was a high bit of ground, which they would make for and be safe if they sensed the danger of rising water and started in time. If they hadn't—well, he would just have to round up as many as he could and drive them that way. The water was up to his waist now; still he kept on, holding the lantern high. If he had not known by heart every inch of the ground he would have stepped off into water over his head. But he knew how to keep to the ridges; he could even feel his way across a footlog covered by water; and after a while, all out of breath, he made out the high ground through the trees. The shine of the lantern long before he reached this haven showed the sleek sides and gleaming eyes of cattle huddled together.

"That's it, boys an' gals!" he yelled. "You knowed more'n I 'lowed you did! You still got some brains lef' in yo' thick flat heads!"

He was among them now, slapping their flanks, calling them by name, shoving them about familiarly to see if they were all here. Off to the side was a shed built by fishermen with a rough fireplace and chimney at one end. Here he built a fire, pulled off his wet trousers and socks and hung them up to dry. Then he raked together for a bed some straw which fishermen had used to sit on. His eyes in the firelight were bright now. This was the kind of thing he liked.

It was a deep sleep he fell into, so deep that he did not see through the forest an ever expanding glow in the sky; he did not hear the restless animals moving about as in vague terror; he did not hear out in the farm lands that bordered the swamp the excited crowing of cocks, as if some strange day had dawned.

It was four o'clock when he woke, got into his damp trousers and shoes and started back. It was pitch black. The waters had gone down somewhat, still he had to wade out. Clear of the swamp, he blew out the lantern.

When he came to the patch of woods where he had seen the car he stopped—there was no car here now! He struck a match and held it close to the ground to make

sure it had not been a vision. There were the tracks where it had entered the woods, and others where it had been driven out again. He raised his head and sniffed the air. There was a strange smell abroad, as if the woods had been burned off in the night. Wondering what it could mean, he started on home.

Day was dawning as he passed Squire Kirby's, and Jake, Kirby's negro hand who fed the mules and horses, was just entering the yard. In the dim light Jake looked quickly at him, then stopped.

"Dat you, Mr. Jeff Potter?" he demanded.

There was something strange in Jake's voice, and in his face too. Old Jeff thought about it as he splashed along the road home.

"Jake must 'a' thought I was a ha'nt too," he chuckled.

He did not hear the news until nearly midday. Worn out, he had fallen asleep across the bed on reaching home and had not waked until after nine. Then he had wound up the clock, got his lonely breakfast, and made a shift of tidying up his room. After that, he went outside. The weather had cleared; it was a bland winter day of the South, with the drenched straw fields and woods sparkling in the sun. He wandered aimlessly around his yard a while, and finally sat down on a bench in front of his cabin, and lit his pipe. He did not notice that the negroes in front of that other cabin across the field were looking curiously his way.

He was very lonely now. The excitement of the night had passed. Usually on Sunday mornings like this he went to Blainey's store, where others gathered—except when there was preaching—out in front and on the porch. They would be gathering there now, talking about him, and about the row last night. As for him, so long as he lived, he could never go there again.

And so he was brooding when Bill Carson came along the old field road. Bill's face was grave and he was hurrying. As he turned into the yard Jeff rose, his heart suddenly pounding.

"Jeff, ain't you heard, man?"

"Heerd what, Bill?"

"Frank Blainey's store burned down at two o'clock las' night!"

Off yonder across the field old Jeff was suddenly conscious that the negroes were looking his way; and in Carson's eyes he saw a close, narrow, searching scrutiny.

"Come on inside," said Carson.

And inside, half dazed, Jeff heard. Folks—some folks—said he did it. The Blainey's especially. Frank was telling everybody.

"You see, Jeff," said Carson, gravely, "some niggers up here say they saw you goin' toward the store at midnight. You didn't have any lantern lit. Jake saw you comin' back at daylight. They all spoke to you, but you didn't speak to them. An', Jeff, every other man aroun' here was at that fire but you!"

"Bill!" The old man's voice was rising, "Bill, tell me as man to man—do you believe I done it?"

Then Carson tried to quiet him, tried to evade the question, too. One thing was certain anyhow—the woman and children didn't believe it. "I just left home, Jeff," he said. "My wife an' the kids had heard about it. They say they know you never done it. They made me come. I left little Ella cryin'. She wouldn't go to Sunday-school this mornin'."

But the old man was not to be put off. He was leaning across the table now, eyes dilated. The fear of all wild and half-wild creatures—the fear of the trap—was upon him. "Bill!" he cried. "Does Squire Kirby believe I done it? Tell me the truth, man, for God-A'mighty's sake!"

"He don't say, Jeff."

Over and over, while Carson listened, old Jeff described his movements in the swamp the night before. At last Carson rose to go; there was pity in his eyes now in the presence of the old man's excitement.

"You just stick aroun' the house to-day," he said kindly. "If you go where folks are they'll start you talkin'."

And old Jeff stayed at home. At first it was hard, for there was panic in his heart. He wanted to know what was going on beyond those woods that separated him from the more thickly settled part of the community. All morning, anxiously, he watched the road that led from the main thoroughfare to his cabin. Then after dinner, no one having come along the road, and his mind having grown weary of its own anxiety, he bethought him of little Ella Carson, who had cried, and who wouldn't go to Sunday-school because they said he burned the store. And he went into the cabin, and from underneath the table picked out a piece of white pine boxing.

"I'll carve her an Injun," he said. "An Injun gal."

And with the thought came relief. Hours he worked, sitting outside his cabin on the bench, while the shavings, ever finer drawn, accumulated at his feet and the formless fragment of dry-goods box took shape. Now and then he whetted his keen multibladed knife; now and then, all oblivious, he held the work up for his critical inspection.

Even the nose and chin he carved to a nicety, holding the little figure close, smiling at it now and then, the while his mind, running ahead, saw the completed work. She should have hair from the tip of a black mink's tail; stain from a pokeberry bush would color her; he would strap a tiny papoose across her back with a bit of crimson cloth.

"The little gal will like that," he chuckled. "Yes—she'll like that!"

And as he worked, his face now knotted, now serene, he forgot the store and the fire, he did not observe the lengthening shadows, he did not feel the chill of late afternoon. The sun had dropped low when at last he arose suddenly and, still oblivious, started across the field toward the woods.

His old eyes burned with creative fires. This figure in his hand was the best thing he had ever done. She was his humble masterpiece, this Indian girl who had brought him forgetfulness in his trouble. She was ready to be colored now; but no ordinary pokeberry stain would do

for her. Deep in the swamp grew bushes whose berries gave a finer and richer tint than any close about. There was an eager smile on his face as he entered the woods.

He had not seen the commotion among the watching negroes when he rose and hurried across the field; he had not seen them beckoning to someone coming along the road. Now, far in the woods, he did not hear the steps behind him as he pushed through the undergrowth that fringed the swamp.

He found the bush he wanted and began his work. He had stained her to the waist, a rich, dark-red color; he was all intent on his task, when he heard the rustle of leaves behind him, and turned. What he saw made him put the figure quickly in his pocket, as if to hide her from those narrowed eyes. For there, straight at him, head and shoulders above the bushes, came Tom Kelly, rural policeman.

"Tryin' to git away, was you, ol' man?" grinned Kelly. "Well, it's bad policy, an' you're old enough to know it." Then solemnly, with eyes still narrowed, as if within him resided all the dignity and all the sternness of the law: "I've got a warrant here for you, swore out this afternoon befo' Magistrate Kirby by Frank Blainey. Come along now, an' don't raise no trouble."

It might all have been different if the old man had listened to his friends—to Squire Kirby, who next morning bound him over to court, and to Bill Carson, who went on his bond, two thousand dollars it was, for hadn't he tried to make a get-away, and hadn't Frank Blainey bitterly opposed turning him loose at all?

The squire and Carson, in a conference after the preliminary trial, advised him to employ to defend him Allen and Cathcart, both of them young, energetic, and highly successful lawyers, and offered between them to advance the money to pay the bill. It wasn't because he doubted their friendship, or was ungrateful, that he did not heed their advice. But these lawyers were young, their minds were taken up with big affairs. What was an old man to them?

Then Jeff had his prejudices, too. More than once, when he was in the county seat, he had seen on the windows of the town skyscraper the gilded sign of Allen and Cathcart. He had seen their big cars and their handsome homes on Main Street. Now, in his extremity, and in his ignorance also, he distrusted them with the poor man's distrust of the ostentatiously well-to-do. He did not want Allen and Cathcart.

Even while Kirby and Carson talked, his mind, in relief, had turned to another lawyer, old like himself, and neither rich nor ostentatious—old Colonel Donaldson, whom Sam Blainey used to employ to look up deeds, who had come out one day to fish with him and Sam. This was the lawyer he wanted.

He said nothing about it; he asked no one's advice; but at four o'clock on the morning after his release on bail he set out on foot to the county seat, and at nine o'clock presented himself at the ancient and shabby offices of Colonel Donaldson on Law Row, just behind the courthouse. Heart pounding fast, he told his story to the dry and pedantic old lawyer, who sat behind a littered table in a dingy room where rows of dusty books, Shakespeares, Miltons, Thackerays, Dickensses, and Scotts climbed upward to the cobwebby ceiling.

Anybody would have told him this was not the man to go to; that it had been years since he appeared in court in anything but civil cases; that he might be the man to run down an old deed, but not to plead a case before a jury; that such fires of youth as he might have possessed—and it was said that he had known them once—had burned out long ago.

And yet old Jeff, looking at that thin old scholar surrounded by his books, trembled lest his case be turned down; while his friends, had they known, would have trembled lest it be accepted. And no one who knew the colonel would have dreamed that he would take such a case. It must have been some queer bond that exists between old men that moved him.

"Very well, sir," he said, dryly, "I'll take the case.

Yes, I recall Sam Blainey quite distinctly—a fine man. I remember the fishing trip to which you refer.”

He asked a number of questions, rather wearily, leaning back, tips of fingers together. His eyes under his spectacles, that were dusty like his window panes, did light up just a moment when his questions brought out the fact that Jeff had seen a car in the woods. Then he copied down the number in a notebook. He would look into that, he said without conviction.

“God knows!” It broke from old Jeff, it was a cry for sympathy. “God knows I never burned that sto’!”

The voice of the ancient lawyer was dry and unimpressed. “Unfortunately, in a case of this kind it’s court and jury, not the Almighty, which you have to convince. . . . The Indian, you say, you were staining on that afternoon when you were arrested in the swamp—and by the way, sir, it’s a bad thing to be arrested in a swamp—have you that Indian with you?”

Trembling, the old man reached in the pocket of his ragged overcoat. Because of some fear that in his absence his cabin would be searched, he had brought his treasure with him.

“Here she is, Colonel,” he said eagerly.

The lawyer reached across the table, took the figure, and holding it up looked at it with a smile strangely sweet. Then he arose and went over to a rusty safe in the corner. He put her carefully away in the drawer, closed the iron doors on her and turned the combination.

“I’ll just keep this,” he said. “And now that will be all this morning. I’ll try and arrange for your case to be called as near the opening of court as possible. Keep close at home. And remember—don’t tell anybody anything.”

He turned to a shelf and got down a volume—probably he had already dismissed the case from his mind; and Jeff came out into the alley, above which towered the walls of the courthouse where soon he was to appear before judge and jury, with only that dry old recluse to stand between him and the penitentiary.

The terrible mistake he had made was duly impressed on him that night by Kirby, who drove over to arrange to take him to town to consult Allen and Cathcart in the morning. Jeff had to admit now what he had done, and Kirby was dumfounded.

"You want to go to the pen?" he demanded, pointing his finger at his tenant, his white beard thrust belligerently forward. "You think you'd like it there, old man? Do you know how strong the evidence is against you? Don't you know, Jeff, I wouldn't have sent you up if it hadn't been? Have you any notion how slim yo' chance is? My God, man—old Donaldson!"

"He's smart, Mr. Kirby!" cried Jeff. "Ever seen his books? Piled up to the ceilin', clutterin' up the winders and fireplaces?"

"An' what kind of books? Ol' law books in one room, yes. Novels an' po'try in the other! It was the novels an' po'try you saw; an' it's the novels an' po'try he reads. Jeff, listen to me—what made him take the case, God only knows. He's forgot about it by now. His mind is back on them ol' Romans an' centurions. There's been millions an' billions of people in the world he knows about—history an' the like. What difference does one ol' feller in the pen make to him? He was thinkin' about ancient Babylon an' Sodom an' Gomorrah this mornin'. He don't even know what he's done. He'll forget to come to the trial! Now let's get down to brass tacks. You let me go to town to-morrow an' tell him you've changed yo' mind. It's yo' life you're playin' with, man! If you go to the pen for arson you'll die there! You'll never come out again! You're too old!"

Jeff's face knotted with pain. But he was true to his simple code. "It—it's too late, Squire. I've give him the case. It wouldn't be fair—no, it wouldn't be fair."

On the third day of the March term of court, at a quarter of nine in the morning, pale and drawn of face, old Jeff climbed the spiral stairs of the courthouse with Squire Kirby, grimly silent, beside him. Only one communication, in all the weeks that had elapsed since Jeff's visit to him, had Colonel Donaldson sent. That was a crisp notice to appear this morning in court.

44 CHARGE AGAINST JEFF POTTER

Potter wasn't the kind of man he wanted to have around the store. Women didn't like to come where he was.

"What women—what women, Colonel Donaldson?" whispered Kirby. "Quick—ask him what women!"

But Colonel Donaldson, sitting back in his chair, the tips of his thin fingers together, his eyes—piercing eyes, too, they were—fastened on the witness, did not seem even to hear; while old Jeff bowed his gray head in shame, and his hands clasped and unclasped on the table before him, and his collar choked him so that he opened it at the neck.

It was at lunch, which followed immediately after Frank's testimony, that Kirby broke loose. He and Jeff, Bill Carson and his wife, and little Ella, had eaten in a restaurant; and now Kirby rose to pay the bill.

"He just don't care—don't care that!" And Kirby snapped his strong fingers. "I've been in many a trial. I never befo' saw a lawyer not even raise a finger to save a client!"

A curious crowd had gathered round them. "That's right," some of them said. "He ain't done a thing." And Mrs. Carson, face upraised, grabbed old Jeff by the sleeve, while little Ella clung to her mother's skirt.

"Oh, get another lawyer," pleaded the woman, "before it's too late. Please—please!"

Jeff swallowed, but he shook his head. "It wouldn't be fair," he said. "No—it wouldn't be fair."

Early in the afternoon the ancient and supine lawyer for the defense showed the first spark. The testimony for the State was all in, and he had put Kirby on the stand. His voice as he stood, stiff and formal beside Jeff's chair, was dry, matter of fact.

"How long, Squire Kirby, have you known the defendant, Jeff Potter?"

"Forty years."

"You must know, then, his reputation for law and order. Is it good or bad?"

"Good."

Then Burton Evans, exuding confidence, was on his

feet. "He's a tenant on your place, I believe, Mr. Kirby. Did he pay his rent last year?"

Kirby turned to the judge. "Your Honor," he asked, "must I answer that question?"

The judge looked at Colonel Donaldson. "Do I hear any objections from the plaintiff's lawyer? If so I may rule that question out. If not—"

The voice was dry. "No objection, Your Honor." And Kirby, from the witness chair, glared.

"He paid me what I asked," snapped Kirby.

"And what did you ask, Mr. Kirby?" demanded Evans.

The judge was frowning now—frowning at Donaldson. Back in the court-room a slight buzz of voices began. Two or three spectators left benches in the rear and, bent double, as if to hide their progress, darted to seats nearer the front. And when at last Donaldson spoke, it was as if to further the case of the State.

"As a matter of fact, Mr. Kirby," he asked, "did he not pay you, for rent, one or more carved Indians, which you sent to your grandchildren as Christmas presents?"

"Yes," said Kirby.

"Silence in the court!" cried the sheriff.

Burton Evans turned away, a triumphant smile on his face. Then he glanced at the jury. They were mostly men of family; and now he must have remembered suddenly that Donaldson, in choosing the jury, had thrown out unmarried men and men without children; and for the first time now he must have noticed that the jury was mostly old men, some of them plainly grandfathers. Anyway, Burton Evans's smile suddenly vanished!

"Jeff Potter," said Donaldson, "will you take the stand?"

Old Jeff never knew how he got there. He only knew he was sitting in a chair on a platform, his tattered hat between his knees; that before him were thousands of faces; that thousands of eyes were turned upon him; that to the left the jury were leaning forward; and that to the right the judge's swivel chair creaked as His Honor turned toward him. Then he saw that Colonel Donald-

son was still standing very erect by his table. Colonel Donaldson was speaking.

"We will not now go into the happenings of that night, Jeff Potter, the night on which it is alleged by the State that you burned the store of this man." He stopped and looked hard at Blainey. "The State may question you on that if the State so wishes. But I want to get at another matter. Mr. Kelly—I believe that is the officer's name—has stated that on the afternoon he came to arrest you, you tried to escape by running to the woods. Now, Jefferson Potter, tell the judge and jury why you went to the woods, sir. Talk loud, so they can hear."

"I went"—old Jeff hardly knew his own voice—"I went to git some pokeberry juice to color an Injun with."

"And this Indian—for whom were you carving it?"

"Fer little Ella Kyarson."

"And why were you carving an Indian for little Ella Carson? Talk loud, so the jury there can hear you."

Jeff turned toward them. They were leaning forward still farther now, these old graybeards, their eyes on him, their faces suddenly all kindly.

"I was carvin' it fer her because she said she never believed I sot that sto' on fire."

The prosecutor, face flushed, sprang to his feet. "I object to all this, Your Honor! I contend, sir, that this is a patent attempt—"

But the judge checked him. "The evidence is admissible, sir," he said. "The officer testified that the defendant was trying to leave the country. Now it is quite in order for the defense to show that some other motive than escape induced the defendant to enter the swamp where he was arrested."

The dry voice resumed: "So you were carving an Indian maiden for the little girl who did not believe you burned the store. Is that it?"

"Yes, sir. Her father said she was cryin' an' wouldn't go to Sunday-school."

"Do you see the little girl in court?"

"Yes, sir. That's her. Settin' thar on the front bench with her ma."

There was a general commotion. People in the rear of the court-room stood up. The jury all looked toward that front bench, while a mother and a little girl in a blue dress both blushed scarlet.

And now a strange thing was happening: Old Colonel Donaldson, his manner still perfectly impersonal, had walked over to the table below the clerk's desk and opened a bundle.

"I submit this in evidence, Your Honor. Here is the Indian girl he was carving. Does Your Honor care to look at it? You will observe that it is half stained, showing where the work was interrupted by the advent of the officer."

The judge took it and inspected it, a smile on his strong-lined face. He handed it back, and the colonel walked over to the jury. "Pass it around, gentlemen," he directed, "from one to the other."

And now the astonished old man in the witness box saw the whole court-room seem to move forward, people leaving their seats to peer; heard over and over the sheriff's "Silence in the court!" and saw on the faces of the jury that passed the carved bit of wood from hand to hand the smiles of fathers and grandfathers who would like to take it home to the children.

But his relief was short-lived: Burton Evans had pounced on him.

The questions came thick and fast, after the old man had told the story of his movements that night. Cattle in the swamp? What cattle? Wasn't he a little over-anxious about another man's cattle—a man he owed rent to? (No objection from Colonel Donaldson.) Did he have owl's eyes that he could find his way about on a pitch-black night? If his mission were an honest one, why didn't he light a lantern? Was it his custom to draw back and hide from passers-by? Was it his custom not to acknowledge a friendly greeting in the road? Did he usually sleep as sound as he slept that night?

But old Jeff, buffeted about like an untrained boxer standing before a professional, managed somehow to keep on his feet, to stick to the truth, though the sweat stood out on his face, and his limp old hat was twisted into

a rag, and the crowd and jury swam round and round before him.

Groggy, he came down at last, though not until the judge himself had interposed in his behalf, and not until the eyes of the jury were full of compassion, and not until from the front bench came the voice of a mother trying to quiet a sobbing child.

He sank down limp into his chair, to find Squire Kirby tugging at the coat-tails of Colonel Donaldson, who had risen, and whispering over and over, his voice full of respect now:

"Rest the case, Colonel! Rest the case, rest the case! You've brought out the Injun! You give Evans rope, an' he's hung hisself! Colonel Donaldson, Colonel Donaldson, give the case to the jury as quick as you kin!"

But the ancient lawyer regarded not at all the frantic whispers or the tugs at his coat-tails. Voice still dry and impersonal, he spoke to the judge:

"May it please Your Honor, I want Mr. Blainey put on the stand once more. I have just a few questions to ask him. There are some details which I overlooked. I am sure, sir, that a man of Mr. Blainey's humane and just temperament will not mind going on the stand again. I am sure the state attorney can have no possible objections, sir. Mr. Blainey?"

Followed a brief excited conference between Blainey and Evans. Then, very pale, Blainey was in the witness chair, and Donaldson was standing very straight by his table, the afternoon sun streaming through one of the high gothic windows of the old courthouse, and shining full on his thin, hawk-like face.

"Mr. Blainey, what time did you leave the store that night?"

"I've answered that once," said Blainey.

"Well, answer it again!"

"I said eleven."

"Wasn't it later than that?"

Blainey looked at Evans, who nodded, his lips compressed.

"Oh, it might have been half past."

"Was it as late as twelve?"

"No—it was not!"

And now once more the sheriff shouted "Silence in the court!" For the old lawyer had advanced two quick steps toward the witness, and suddenly his voice, shrill and grating, rang out, while a thrill like an electric shock ran through the court-room.

"Wasn't it two o'clock? Answer me, sir—wasn't it two? . . . You do not answer. Very well. Answer me this: Did some friends of yours drive out to see you that night in a car? Did they park the car in the woods near your store? Did they bring with them some liquor and some cards and some chips? Did you have a game of poker in the basement of your store? Did all of you imbibe freely of that liquor in the course of the game? Did you, while under the influence of that liquor, throw lighted cigar and cigarette stubs on the floor of the basement of that store that was littered with packing of all sorts, and excelsior?"

Again Evans was on his feet, apoplectic with objections. But the old lawyer went on, before the judge could speak, his voice high-pitched and metallic, filling the excited court-room.

"Is it a fact, sir, that at two o'clock your friends took you home in that car? Is it a fact, sir, that before you reached that house you saw a glow in the sky? And that when these friends wanted to go back you said: 'Let the damn store burn—it's insured'?"

"Don't answer those questions," thundered Evans. "Your Honor, this man's not on trial!"

"He will be!" cried the old lawyer, "for perjury in open court! I am *not* surmising, Your Honor. I can prove the truth of everything I have implied, sir. I was fortunate enough to get hold of the number of that car. Through the number I traced the occupants. Happily for the good of our humanity, sir, there is always to be found among a group of young men, however wild, one who will tell the truth. Such a one is young John Duckett, who was in that car that night." He turned to the

court-room. "Mr. Court Crier—call John Duckett into court!"

At one side of the witness chair that sat high above the main court-room, and which was on a level with the judge's seat, ran a railing. And now Frank Blainey, who had been growing whiter and whiter, turned sideways, his arm on this railing, and buried his face in his arm, his fingers clutching at his hair. With a cry, Mrs. Blainey sprang to her feet and started forward. The voice of the judge was clear and compelling.

"Keep your seat, madam. Stay where you are, the rest of you. This witness has not fainted. Mr. Crier, one minute. Do not call the other witness until I so instruct you. Mr. Blainey, here, seems to have something on his mind. Mr. Blainey?"

Blainey raised his face. The glance he shot at Donaldson was a bit wild, a bit vicious, too. His hair was all disheveled. He sat limp in his chair. The judge, turning toward him, went on.

"Mr. Blainey, if you have anything to say concerning the facts implied in Colonel Donaldson's questions, you are at liberty to speak, sir. Otherwise this witness, Mr. Duckett, will be called. My advice to you, Mr. Blainey, is that you speak."

The court-room was straining forward now; hundreds of tense faces were turned toward the witness chair, faces strained in the effort to hear the mumbling, halting, reluctant words.

"I—I— Aw, it's all true!"

"Sit up, Mr. Blainey!" commanded the judge. "Look at me, sir. You have perjured yourself in this court! That is a grave offense; but it is as nothing, sir, compared with the motive behind that perjury. In order to save your practices from exposure, you would have sent an old man to prison, probably for the remainder of his natural life. I have no words strong enough, sir, to express my abhorrence, and the abhorrence of all men, of what you've done! Are you listening, Mr. Blainey?"

Again the vicious glance around, followed by the bowed head, and a nod.

"But," continued the judge, "the law puts in my hands the means of punishing you. By your own confession, you have committed perjury, and perjury is punished by a long jail sentence and a heavy fine. Combined, they will not be sufficient for your offense, but they will be enough, sir, to make you remember all the rest of your days—"

And now he stopped, for from his seat, face quivering, old Jeff had sprung to his feet.

"Jedge!" he cried. "Don't send him to the pen, Jedge! Jedge, he's Sam Blainey's son!"

Compassionately the judge looked down at him where he stood beside the table, trembling; then he spoke:

"Sit down, old man. Frank Blainey, the man whom you have attempted so grievously to wrong pleads for you. And because of his plea, which I can do nothing but honor and accede to, I shall remit any prison sentence which I might have imposed. But I warn you, sir, that when the time for your trial comes, in the due process of law, I shall fine you to the very limit allowed me by the statute. Mr. Sheriff, see that this man, Frank Blainey, does not leave the jurisdiction of this court."

"Old man; stand up once more, so that all in this court-room may see you. . . . Jeff Potter, this plea of yours shall go down on the records of this court as a memorial to you and as a high example to all men who may know or read of it of that quality of mercy which is the sovereign good in human nature. And now, gentlemen of the jury, you are automatically discharged from this case, and I shall ask the crowd to pass out quietly, for court is adjourned."

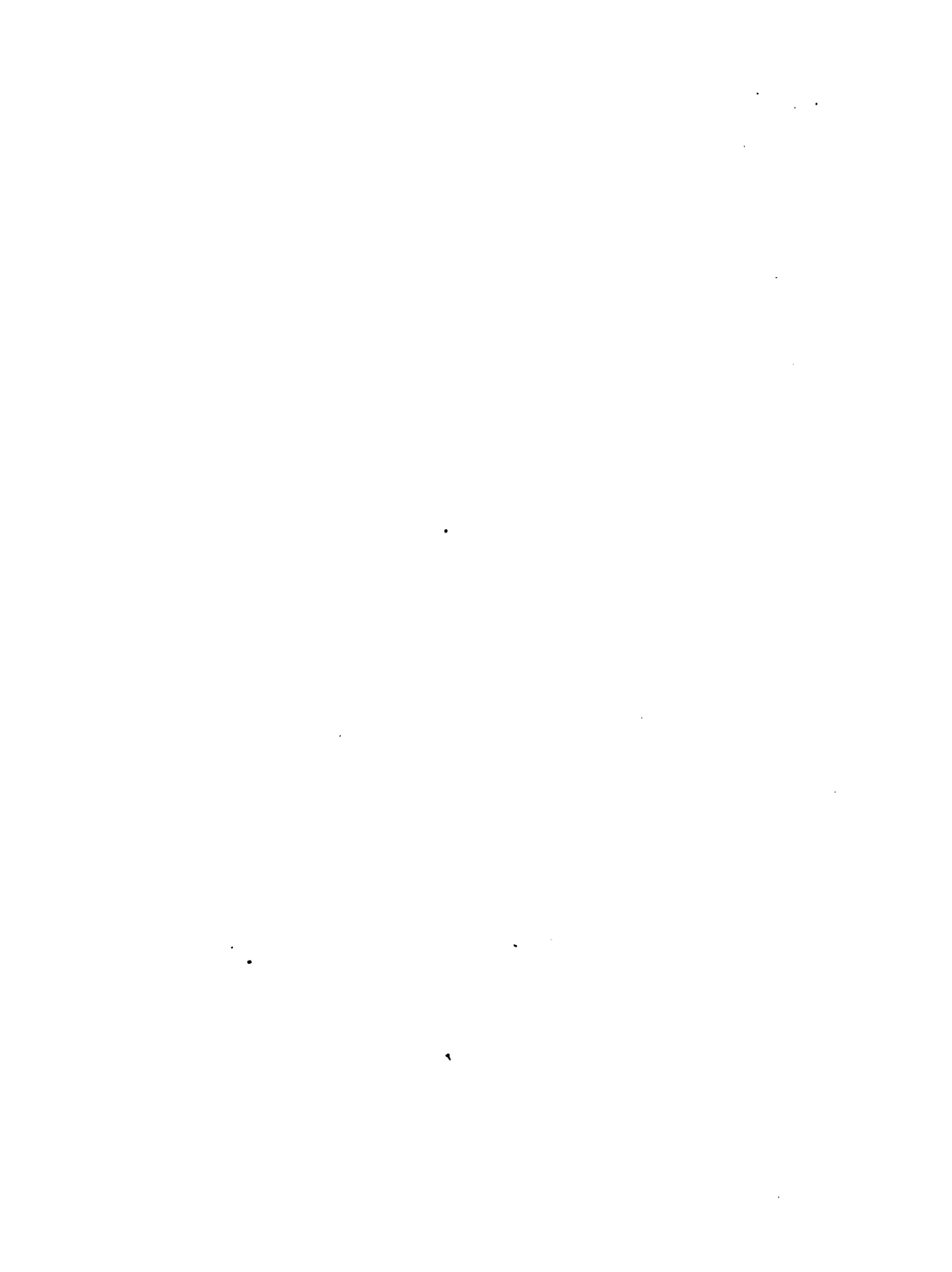
How many people old Jeff shook hands with that afternoon, he never knew. He did know though that Burton Evans was the first among them; that Mrs. Carson, who came next, was crying; that the strong hands of Bill Carson and Squire Kirby almost crushed his own frailer hand; and that off yonder, at a table below the clerk's desk, a prim old lawyer in a long black coat had picked up a carved Indian and was presenting it to a little girl in a blue dress, with an old-fashioned bow strange to see.

The Century Magazine

"A SOURCE OF IRRITATION"

BY

STACY AUMONIER



"A SOURCE OF IRRITATION"¹

By STACY AUMONIER

TO look at old Sam Gates you would never suspect him of having nerves. His sixty-nine years of close application to the needs of the soil had given him a certain earthy stolidity. To observe him hoeing, or thinning out a broad field of turnips, hardly attracted one's attention, he seemed so much part and parcel of the whole scheme. He blended into the soil like a glorified swede. Nevertheless, the half-dozen people who claimed his acquaintance knew him to be a man who suffered from little moods of irritability.

And on this glorious morning a little incident annoyed him unreasonably. It concerned his niece Aggie. She was a plump girl with clear, blue eyes, and a face as round and inexpressive as the dumplings for which the county was famous. She came slowly across the long sweep of the downland and, putting down the bundle wrapped in a red handkerchief which contained his breakfast and dinner, she said:

"Well, Uncle, is there any noos?"

Now, this may not appear to the casual reader to be a remark likely to cause irritation, but it affected old Sam Gates as a very silly and unnecessary question. It was, moreover, the constant repetition of it which was beginning to anger him. He met his niece twice a day. In the morning she brought his bundle of food at seven, and when he passed his sister's cottage on the way home to tea at five she was invariably hanging about the gate, and she always said in the same voice:

"Well, Uncle, is there any noos?"

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Noos! What noos should there be? For sixty-nine years he had never lived farther than five miles from Halvesham. For nearly sixty of those years he had bent his back above the soil. There were, indeed, historic occasions. Once, for instance, when he had married Annie Hachet. And there was the birth of his daughter. There was also a famous occasion when he had visited London. Once he had been to a flower-show at Market Roughborough. He either went or didn't go to church on Sundays. He had had many interesting chats with Mr. James at the Cowman, and three years ago had sold a pig to Mrs. Way. But he couldn't always have interesting noos of this sort up his sleeve. Didn't the 'silly zany know that for the last three weeks he had been hoeing and thinning out turnips for Mr. Hodge on this very same field? What noos could there be?

He blinked at his niece, and didn't answer. She undid the parcel and said:

"Mrs. Goping's fowl got out again last night."

"Ah," he replied in a non-committal manner and began to munch his bread and bacon. His niece picked up the handkerchief and, humming to herself, walked back across the field.

It was a glorious morning, and a white sea mist added to the promise of a hot day. He sat there munching, thinking of nothing in particular, but gradually subsiding into a mood of placid content. He noticed the back of Aggie disappear in the distance. It was a mile to the cottage and a mile and a half to Halvesham. Silly things, girls. They were all alike. One had to make allowances. He dismissed her from his thoughts, and took a long swig of tea out of a bottle. Insects buzzed lazily. He tapped his pocket to assure himself that his pouch of shag was there, and then he continued munching. When he had finished, he lighted his pipe and stretched himself comfortably. He looked along the line of turnips he had thinned and then across the adjoining field of swedes. Silver streaks appeared on the sea below the mist. In some dim way he felt happy in his solitude amidst this sweeping immensity of earth and sea and sky.

And then something else came to irritate him: it was one of "these dratted airypplanes." "Airypplanes" were his pet aversion. He could find nothing to be said in their favor. Nasty, noisy, disfiguring things that seared the heavens and made the earth dangerous. And every day there seemed to be more and more of them. Of course "this old war" was responsible for a lot of them, he knew. The war was a "plaguy noosance." They were short-handed on the farm, beer and tobacco were dear, and Mrs. Steven's nephew had been and got wounded in the foot.

He turned his attention once more to the turnips; but an "airypplane" has an annoying genius for gripping one's attention. When it appears on the scene, however much we dislike it, it has a way of taking the stage-center. We cannot help constantly looking at it. And so it was with old Sam Gates. He spat on his hands and blinked up at the sky. And suddenly the aëroplane behaved in a very extraordinary manner. It was well over the sea when it seemed to lurch drunkenly and skimmed the water. Then it shot up at a dangerous angle and zig-zagged. It started to go farther out, and then turned and made for the land. The engines were making a curious grating noise. It rose once more, and then suddenly dived downward, and came plump down right in the middle of Mr. Hodge's field of swedes.

And then, as if not content with this desecration, it ran along the ground, ripping and tearing up twenty-five yards of good swedes, and then came to a stop.

Old Sam Gates was in a terrible state. The aëroplane was more than a hundred yards away, but he waved his arms and called out:

"Hi, you there, you mustn't land in they swedes! They're Mister Hodge's."

The instant the aëroplane stopped, a man leaped out and gazed quickly round. He glanced at Sam Gates, and seemed uncertain whether to address him or whether to concentrate his attention on the flying-machine. The latter arrangement appeared to be his ultimate decision. He dived under the engine and became frantically busy.

Sam had never seen any one work with such furious energy; but all the same it was not to be tolerated. It was disgraceful. Sam started out across the field, almost hurrying in his indignation. When he appeared within earshot of the aviator he cried out again:

"Hi! you mustn't rest your old airyplane here! You've kicked up all Mr. Hodge's swedes. A noice thing you've done!"

He was within five yards when suddenly the aviator turned and covered him with a revolver! And speaking in a sharp, staccato voice, he said:

"Old Grandfather, you must sit down. I am very much occupied. If you interfere or attempt to go away, I shoot you. So!"

Sam gazed at the horrid, glittering little barrel and gasped. Well, he never! To be threatened with murder when you're doing your duty in your employer's private property! But, still, perhaps the man was mad. A man must be more or less mad to go up in one of those crazy things. And life was very sweet on that summer morning despite sixty-nine years. He sat down among the swedes.

The aviator was so busy with his cranks and machinery that he hardly deigned to pay him any attention except to keep the revolver handy. He worked feverishly, and Sam sat watching him. At the end of ten minutes he appeared to have solved his troubles with the machine, but he still seemed very scared. He kept on glancing round and out to sea. When his repairs were complete he straightened his back and wiped the perspiration from his brow. He was apparently on the point of springing back into the machine and going off when a sudden mood of facetiousness, caused by relief from the strain he had endured, came to him. He turned to old Sam and smiled, at the same time remarking:

"Well, old Grandfather, and now we shall be all right, isn't it?"

He came close up to Sam, and then suddenly started back.

"Gott!" he cried, "Paul Jouperts!"

Bewildered, Sam gazed at him, and the madman

started talking to him in some foreign tongue. Sam shook his head.

"You no roight," he remarked, "to come bargain' through they swedes of Mr. Hodge's."

And then the aviator behaved in a most peculiar manner. He came up and examined Sam's face very closely, and gave a sudden tug at his beard and hair, as if to see whether they were real or false.

"What is your name, old man?" he said.

"Sam Gates."

The aviator muttered some words that sounded something like "mare vudish," and then turned to his machine. He appeared to be dazed and in a great state of doubt. He fumbled with some cranks, but kept glancing at old Sam. At last he got into the car and strapped himself in. Then he stopped, and sat there deep in thought. At last he suddenly unstrapped himself and sprang out again and, approaching Sam, said very deliberately:

"Old Grandfather, I shall require you to accompany me."

Sam gasped.

"Eh?" he said. "What be talkin' about? 'Company? I got these 'ere loines o' turnips—I be already behoind—" The disgusting little revolver once more flashed before his eyes.

"There must be no discussion," came the voice. "It is necessary that you mount the seat of the car without delay. Otherwise I shoot you like the dog you are. So!"

Old Sam was hale and hearty. He had no desire to die so ignominiously. The pleasant smell of the Norfolk downland was in his nostrils; his foot was on his native heath. He mounted the seat of the car, contenting himself with a mutter:

"Well, that be a noice thing, I must say! Flyin' about the country with all they turnips on'y half thinned!"

He found himself strapped in. The aviator was in a fever of anxiety to get away. The engines made a ghastly splutter and noise. The thing started running along the ground. Suddenly it shot upward, giving the swedes a last contemptuous kick. At twenty minutes to eight

that morning old Sam found himself being borne right up above his fields and out to sea! His breath came quickly. He was a little frightened.

"God forgive me!" he murmured.

The thing was so fantastic and sudden that his mind could not grasp it. He only felt in some vague way that he was going to die, and he struggled to attune his mind to the change. He offered up a mild prayer to God, Who, he felt, must be very near, somewhere up in these clouds. Automatically he thought of the vicar at Halvesham, and a certain sense of comfort came to him at the reflection that on the previous day he had taken a "cooking of runner beans" to God's representative in that village. He felt calmer after that, but the horrid machine seemed to go higher and higher. He could not turn in his seat and he could see nothing but sea and sky. Of course the man was mad, mad as a March hare. Of what earthly use could *he* be to any one? Besides, he had talked pure gibberish, and called him Paul something, when he had already told him that his name was Sam. The thing would fall down into the sea soon, and they would both be drowned. Well, well, he had almost reached three-score years and ten. He was protected by a screen, but it seemed very cold. What on earth would Mr. Hodge say? There was no one left to work the land but a fool of a boy named Billy Whitehead at Dene's Cross. On, on, on they went at a furious pace. His thoughts danced disconnectedly from incidents of his youth, conversations with the vicar, hearty meals in the open, a frock his sister wore on the day of the postman's wedding, the drone of a psalm, the illness of some ewes belonging to Mr. Hodge. Everything seemed to be moving very rapidly, upsetting his sense of time. He felt outraged, and yet at moments there was something entrancing in the wild experience. He seemed to be living at an incredible pace. Perhaps he was really dead and on his way to the kingdom of God. Perhaps this was the way they took people.

After some indefinite period he suddenly caught sight of a long strip of land. Was this a foreign country, or were they returning? He had by this time lost all feeling of

fear. He became interested and almost disappointed. The "airplane" was not such a fool as it looked. It was very wonderful to be right up in the sky like this. His dreams were suddenly disturbed by a fearful noise. He thought the machine was blown to pieces. It dived and ducked through the air, and things were bursting all round it and making an awful din, and then it went up higher and higher. After a while these noises ceased, and he felt the machine gliding downward. They were really right above solid land—trees, fields, streams, and white villages. Down, down, down they glided. This was a foreign country. There were straight avenues of poplars and canals. This was not Halvesham. He felt the thing glide gently and bump into a field. Some men ran forward and approached them, and the mad aviator called out to them. They were mostly fat men in gray uniforms, and they all spoke this foreign gibberish. Some one came and unstrapped him. He was very stiff and could hardly move. An exceptionally gross-looking man punched him in the ribs and roared with laughter. They all stood round and laughed at him, while the mad aviator talked to them and kept pointing at him. Then he said:

"Old Grandfather, you must come with me."

He was led to an iron-roofed building and shut in a little room. There were guards outside with fixed bayonets. After a while the mad aviator appeared again, accompanied by two soldiers. He beckoned him to follow. They marched through a quadrangle and entered another building. They went straight into an office where a very important-looking man, covered with medals, sat in an easy-chair. There was a lot of saluting and clicking of heels. The aviator pointed at Sam and said something, and the man with the medals started at sight of him, and then came up and spoke to him in English.

"What is your name? Where do you come from? Your age? The name and birthplace of your parents?"

He seemed intensely interested, and also pulled his hair and beard to see if they came off. So well and naturally did he and the aviator speak English that after a voluble

examination they drew apart, and continued the conversation in that language. And the extraordinary conversation was of this nature:

"It is a most remarkable resemblance," said the man with medals. "*Unglaublich!* But what do you want me to do with him, Hausemann?"

"The idea came to me suddenly, Excellency," replied the aviator, "and you may consider it worthless. It is just this. The resemblance is so amazing. Paul Jouperts has given us more valuable information than any one at present in our service, and the English know that. There is an award of five thousand francs on his head. Twice they have captured him, and each time he escaped. All the company commanders and their staff have his photograph. He is a serious thorn in their flesh."

"Well?" replied the man with the medals.

The aviator whispered confidentially:

"Suppose, your Excellency, that they found the dead body of Paul Jouperts?"

"Well?" replied the big man.

"My suggestion is this. To-morrow, as you know, the English are attacking Hill 701, which for tactical reasons we have decided to evacuate. If after the attack they find the dead body of Paul Jouperts in, say, the second line, they will take no further trouble in the matter. You know their lack of thoroughness. Pardon me, I was two years at Oxford University. And consequently Paul Jouperts will be able to prosecute his labors undisturbed."

The man with the medals twirled his mustache and looked thoughtfully at his colleague.

"Where is Paul at the moment?" he asked.

"He is acting as a gardener at the Convent of St. Eloise, at Mailleton-en-haut, which, as you know, is one hundred meters from the headquarters of the British central army staff."

The man with the medals took two or three rapid turns up and down the room, then he said:

"Your plan is excellent, Hausemann. The only point of difficulty is that the attack started this morning."

"This morning?" exclaimed the other.

"Yes; the English attacked unexpectedly at dawn. We have already evacuated the first line. We shall evacuate the second line at eleven-fifty. It is now ten-fifteen. There may be just time."

He looked suddenly at old Sam in the way that a butcher might look at a prize heifer at an agricultural show and remarked casually:

"Yes, it is a remarkable resemblance. It seems a pity not to—do something with it."

Then, speaking in German, he added:

"It is worth trying. And if it succeeds the higher authorities shall hear of your lucky accident and inspiration, Herr Hausemann. Instruct *Ober-lieutenant* Schultz to send the old fool by two orderlies to the east extremity of Trench 38. Keep him there till the order of evacuation is given, then shoot him, but don't disfigure him, and lay him out face upward."

The aviator saluted and withdrew, accompanied by his victim. Old Sam had not understood the latter part of the conversation, and he did not catch quite all that was said in English; but he felt that somehow things were not becoming too promising, and it was time to assert himself. So he remarked when they got outside:

"Now, look 'ee 'ere, Mister, when am I goin' to get back to my turnips?"

And the aviator replied, with a pleasant smile:

"Do not be disturbed, old Grandfather. You shall get back to the soil quite soon."

In a few moments he found himself in a large gray car, accompanied by four soldiers. The aviator left him. The country was barren and horrible, full of great pits and rents, and he could hear the roar of the artillery and the shriek of shells. Overhead, aeroplanes were buzzing angrily. He seemed to be suddenly transported from the kingdom of God to the pit of darkness. He wondered whether the vicar had enjoyed the runner beans. He could not imagine runner beans growing here; runner beans, aye, or anything else. If this was a foreign country, give him dear old England!

Gr-r-r! bang! Something exploded just at the rear of

the car. The soldiers ducked, and one of them pushed him in the stomach and swore.

"An ugly-looking lout," he thought. "If I wor twenty years younger, I'd give him a punch in the eye that 'u'd make him sit up."

The car came to a halt by a broken wall. The party hurried out and dived behind a mound. He was pulled down a kind of shaft, and found himself in a room buried right underground, where three officers were drinking and smoking. The soldiers saluted and handed them a type-written despatch. The officers looked at him drunkenly, and one came up and pulled his beard and spat in his face and called him "an old English swine." He then shouted out some instructions to the soldiers, and they led him out into the narrow trench. One walked behind him, and occasionally prodded him with the butt-end of a gun. The trenches were half full of water and reeked of gases, powder, and decaying matter. Shells were constantly bursting overhead, and in places the trenches had crumbled and were nearly blocked up. They stumbled on, sometimes falling, sometimes dodging moving masses, and occasionally crawling over the dead bodies of men. At last they reached a deserted-looking trench, and one of the soldiers pushed him into the corner of it and growled something, and then disappeared round the angle. Old Sam was exhausted. He leaned panting against the mud wall, expecting every minute to be blown to pieces by one of those infernal things that seemed to be getting more and more insistent. The din went on for nearly twenty minutes, and he was alone in the trench. He fancied he heard a whistle amidst the din. Suddenly one of the soldiers who had accompanied him came stealthily round the corner, and there was a look in his eye old Sam did not like. When he was within five yards the soldier raised his rifle and pointed it at Sam's body. Some instinct impelled the old man at that instant to throw himself forward on his face. As he did so he was aware of a terrible explosion, and he had just time to observe the soldier falling in a heap near him, and then he lost consciousness.

His consciousness appeared to return to him with a snap. He was lying on a plank in a building, and he heard some one say:

"I believe the old boy's English."

He looked round. There were a lot of men lying there, and others in khaki and white overalls were busy among them. He sat up, rubbed his head, and said:

"Hi, Mister, where be I now?"

Some one laughed, and a young man came up and said:

"Well, old man, you were very nearly in hell. Who the devil are you?"

Some one came up, and two of them were discussing him. One of them said:

"He's quite all right. He was only knocked out. Better take him in to the colonel. He may be a spy."

The other came up, touched his shoulder, and remarked:

"Can you walk, Uncle?"

He replied:

"Aye, I can walk all roight."

"That's an old sport!"

The young man took his arm and helped him out of the room into a courtyard. They entered another room, where an elderly, kind-faced officer was seated at a desk. The officer looked up and exclaimed:

"Good God! Bradshaw, do you know who you've got there?"

The younger one said:

"No. Who, sir?"

"It's Paul Jouperts!" exclaimed the colonel.

"Paul Jouperts! Great Scott!"

The older officer addressed himself to Sam. He said:

"Well, we've got you once more, Paul. We shall have to be a little more careful this time."

The young officer said:

"Shall I detail a squad, sir?"

"We can't shoot him without a courtmartial," replied the kind-faced senior.

Then Sam interpolated:

"Look 'ee 'ere, sir, I'm fair' sick of all this. My name bean't Paul. My name's Sam. I was a-thinnin' a loine o' turnips—"

Both officers burst out laughing, and the younger one said:

"Good! damn good! Isn't it amazing, sir, the way they not only learn the language, but even take the trouble to learn a dialect!"

The older man busied himself with some papers.

"Well, Sam," he remarked, "you shall be given a chance to prove your identity. Our methods are less drastic than those of your *Boche* masters. What part of England are you supposed to come from? Let's see how much you can bluff us with your topographical knowledge."

"I was a-thinnin' a loine o' turnips this mornin' at 'alf-past seven on Mr. Hodge's farm at Halvesham when one o' these 'ere airypplanes came down among the swedes. I tells 'e to get clear o' that, when the feller what gets out o' the car 'e drahs a revowlver and 'e says, 'You must 'company I—'"

"Yes, yes," interrupted the senior officer, "that's all very good. Now tell me—where is Halvesham? What is the name of the local vicar? I'm sure you'd know that."

Old Sam rubbed his chin.

"I sits under the Reverend David Pryce, Mister, and a good, God-fearin' man he be. I took him a cookin' o' runner beans on'y yesterday. I works for Mr. Hodge, what owns Greenway Manor and 'as a stud-farm at New-market, they say."

"Charles Hodge?" asked the young officer.

"Aye, Charlie Hodge. You write and ask un if he knows old Sam Gates."

The two officers looked at each other, and the older one looked at Sam more closely.

"It's very extraordinary," he remarked.

"Everybody knows Charlie Hodge," added the younger officer.

It was at that moment that a wave of genius swept over old Sam. He put his hand to his head and suddenly jerked out:

"What's more, I can tell 'ee where this yere Paul is. He's actin' a gardener in a convent at—" He puckered up his brows, fumbled with his hat, and then got out, "Mighteno."

The older officer gasped.

"Mailleton-en-haut! Good God! what makes you say that, old man?"

Sam tried to give an account of his experience and the things he had heard said by the German officers; but he was getting tired, and he broke off in the middle to say:

"Ye haven't a bite o' somethin' to eat, I suppose, Mister; or a glass o' beer? I usually 'as my dinner at twelve o'clock."

Both the officers laughed, and the older said:

"Get him some food, Bradshaw, and a bottle of beer from the mess. We'll keep this old man here. He interests me."

While the younger man was doing this, the chief pressed a button and summoned another junior officer.

"Gateshead," he remarked, "ring up the G. H. Q. and instruct them to arrest the gardener in that convent at the top of the hill and then to report."

The officer saluted and went out, and in a few minutes a tray of hot food and a large bottle of beer were brought to the old man, and he was left alone in the corner of the room to negotiate this welcome compensation. And in the execution he did himself and his county credit. In the meanwhile the officers were very busy. People were coming and going and examining maps, and telephone bells were ringing furiously. They did not disturb old Sam's gastric operations. He cleaned up the mess tins and finished the last drop of beer. The senior officer found time to offer him a cigarette, but he replied:

"Thank 'ee kindly, sir, but I'd rather smoke my pipe."

The colonel smiled and said:

"Oh, all right; smoke away."

He lighted up, and the fumes of the shag permeated the room. Some one opened another window, and the young officer who had addressed him at first suddenly looked at him and exclaimed:

"Innocent, by God! You couldn't get shag like that anywhere but in Norfolk."

It must have been an hour later when another officer entered and saluted.

"Message from the G. H. Q., sir," he said.

"Well?"

"They have arrested the gardener at the convent of St. Eloise, and they have every reason to believe that he is the notorious Paul Jouperts."

The colonel stood up, and his eyes beamed. He came over to old Sam and shook his hand.

"Mr. Gates," he said, "you are an old brick. You will probably hear more of this. You have probably been the means of delivering something very useful into our hands. Your own honor is vindicated. A loving Government will probably award you five shillings or a Victoria Cross or something of that sort. In the meantime, what can I do for you?"

Old Sam scratched his chin.

"I want to get back 'ome," he said.

"Well, even that might be arranged."

"I want to get back 'ome in toime for tea."

"What time do you have tea?"

"Foive o'clock or thereabouts."

"I see."

A kindly smile came into the eyes of the colonel. He turned to another officer standing by the table and said:

"Raikes, is any one going across this afternoon with despatches?"

"Yes, sir," replied the other officer. "Commander Jennings is leaving at three o'clock."

"You might ask him if he could see me."

Within ten minutes a young man in a flight-commander's uniform entered.

"Ah, Jennings," said the colonel, "here is a little affair which concerns the honor of the British army. My friend here, Sam Gates, has come over from Halvesham, in Norfolk, in order to give us valuable information. I have promised him that he shall get home to tea at five o'clock. Can you take a passenger?"

The young man threw back his head and laughed.

"Lord!" he exclaimed, "what an old sport! Yes, I expect I can manage it. Where is the God-forsaken place?"

A large ordnance-map of Norfolk (which had been captured from a German officer) was produced, and the young man studied it closely.

At three o'clock precisely old Sam, finding himself something of a hero and quite glad to escape from the embarrassment which the position entailed upon him, once more sped skyward in a "dratted airplane."

At twenty minutes to five he landed once more among Mr. Hodge's swedes. The breezy young airman shook hands with him and departed inland. Old Sam sat down and surveyed the familiar field of turnips.

"A noice thing, I must say!" he muttered to himself as he looked along the lines of unthinned turnips. He still had twenty minutes, and so he went slowly along and completed a line which he had begun in the morning. He then deliberately packed up his dinner-things and his tools and started out for home.

As he came round the corner of Stillway's meadow and the cottage came in view, his niece stepped out of the copse with a basket on her arm.

"Well, Uncle," she said, "is there any noos?"

It was then that old Sam really lost his temper.

"Noos!" he said. "Noos! Drat the girl! What noos should there be? Sixty-nine year' I live in these 'ere parts, hoein' and weedin' and thinnin', and mindin' Charlie Hodge's sheep. Am I one o' these 'ere story-book folk havin' noos 'appen to me all the time? Ain't it enough, ye silly, dab-faced zany, to earn enough to buy a bite o' some'at to eat and a glass o' beer and a place to rest a's head o'night without always wantin' noos, noos, noos! I tell 'ee it's this that leads 'ee to 'alf the troubles in the world. Devil take the noos!"

And turning his back on her, he went fuming up the hill.

Collier's, The National Weekly

"MOMMA"

BY

RUPERT HUGHES

"MOMMA"¹

By RUPERT HUGHES

MOMMA was sick, right sick. Momma was awful sick! Momma looked like she was going to die any minute. And she didn't care if she did. She up and as good as told Poppa that.

Poppa was scared almost to death when he realized it. He was all alone with her, and had none of the children to talk to about it; though, for the matter of that, Momma and Poppa had never told the children about their own ailments. And now the children had growed up and vamoosed. All that was left of the fact that there ever had been any children round the place was the two old names Momma and Poppa that the old folks had caught by contagion and got to calling each other by from hearing themselves called them by the children when they were children.

Momma and Poppa had been drifting down life like a pair of old mud turtles floating south on an old log. And now all of a sudden one of them felt that the other'n was going to roll off into the muddy water and sink downward, backward, dead!

Perhaps the poor turtles know and grieve and mourn to the full capacity of their tight shells.

But Poppa was a human, gifted with sympathy. He was old acquaintances with grief of every sort, a pitiful postgraduate in all a man knows who has been a lover, a husband, and a father, and has seen children born from one pain and ache to another and another, who has seen some of his own little children die, or pray for death in the long procession of disappointments and thwarted hopes that begin with the first irretrievable rattle lost over the edge of the crib, and pass on to the rainy holidays, the

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sunny schooldays, the warm Christmases, cracked dolls, lost games, indignities from parents who misunderstand and spank, from sweethearts who misunderstand and flirt, and so on and so forth to the dreary, shabby camp-follower sorrows that trudge along at the tail end of the parade.

Poppa's habit had been to take things as they come, because, as somebody said, that's the only way they come. He had grown so jaded with existence that he became a veteran Horatio, who, as Will Shakespeare said, "fortune's buffets and rewards hast ta'en with equal thanks."

Nothing had excited him much of late at the store, at home, at church, the lodge, or in the newspapers. As he had worn what seemed to be the same suit of clothes for years, so his face had worn the same suit of expressions. It was hard to tell his smile from his scowl. Funny things all had a touch of misfortune in them for somebody, and sad things were all kind of funny, so the same twitch at the muscles about his mouth served for an acknowledgment of everything unusual.

But now, when Momma almost wisht she was dead, that last dreadful word twitched Poppa's very heart. He felt as if in the calm slumber of habitude somebody had reached into his breast and given his heart a yank. And it shivered and rattled as an old doorbell clamors pulled hard at midnight by somebody crying: "Wake up! Your house is on fire!"

Poppa woke up. Instinct told him that he must save Momma and himself from the incredible disaster of her death. His business worries had kept him from noticing the little symptoms of her decline, though she had stopped quarreling with him, and had simply quarreled with life, with everything: the food, the neighbors, her clothes, the weather, her stummick, her head, her eyes, her feet, her hands, her appetite, her looks—she even complained of her looks!

And now, as if scales had been scraped off his eyes, Poppa saw that Momma didn't look good. She didn't look a bit good. She looked something scandalous.

Poppa belonged to a lodge, and he had gone to numberless funerals. Yet he had hardly even imagined that some day his fellow members might in turn come to his house, all dressed up with sashes and plumes and swords, to march alongside the black wagon that should carry his one woman in a box to a ditch.

As if some one had set a moving picture going against the wall of his own sitting room, he saw the whole thing, and he shuddered back from it with a cry that struck inward and cut downward and stuck. He had a fishbone in his throat.

He became suddenly young and arrantly afraid. He wanted to run to his wife and cling to her and beg her not to think of such things. But he had given up the habit of hugging Momma or taking her into his lap or sitting on the arm of her chair since the ancient days when the first child began to take notice.

He wanted to go back to the old ways, but it would have looked foolish, and the two frumps had been afraid of each other's love for years and years.

He did nothing and said nothing; but he did a heap of thinking. "Heap" was the word, for his thoughts were like a pile of dead leaves, tarnished, crumpled brown leaves that had been green and radiant and breathing once.

His thoughts were a heap of autumnal rubbish set on fire. Red torment ran through them, and they writhed and twisted as if a new life had come back to them just that they might suffer a little more.

The terror stung him to a determination. "I'll call the doctor," he said. He rose from his chair and shuffled to the telephone. Momma ran after him and dragged his hands down, crying: "I don't want to see that old fool. I'll go jump in the river if you send for him. I couldn't stand the sight of him."

"When a woman's too sick to see the doctor," Poppa said, "it's high time somebody called him in."

He backed round and bunted her away with the minimum of grace and the maximum of devotion, and held her at a distance until he got the number.

Momma flopped helplessly into a chair and cried like

a petulant little girl, while Poppa ordered the doctor to put on his shoes and come right over.

She was still pouting like a little girl when Dr. Noxon came. Her lips were pushed out and her chin was purse-drawn when he asked her what was the matter of her. He held her wrist in one hand and his watch in the other, glanced at her tongue, and in a lowered voice asked one or two very personal questions.

Poppa did most of the talking, while Dr. Noxon nodded and said: "I see, I see." As might have been expected, he left two sets of pills, one kind to be taken after each meal and before retiring, and another kind of pill to be taken on arising and every three hours.

Momma could hardly keep from laughing in the old owl's face, and as soon as he closed the door she bust right out. It was not a nice laugh—hysterics like. She whooped: "I've seen that old nuisance leave those same fool pills on those same fool pieces of paper since we first came to Carthage and called him in. Everybody that ever took 'em has died, and I guess it's my turn! And I don't care!"

Her laughter ended in the wild weeping of a young girl, and Poppa was almost distracted. She went to bed all wore out, but she couldn't sleep.

She kept him awake worse when she laid still trying not to wake him than she did when she thrashed about and groaned.

That was a long night, and Poppa entertained a whole herd of nightmares without falling asleep, or, if he did, he didn't know it and it didn't do him a mite of good.

He waited a day or two to see what effect Dr. Noxon's immemorial pills would have. They had even less effect than he expected they would.

The third day he took the almost sacrilegious step of seeing one of the other doctors. Dr. Champe refused to call since Mrs. Lundy was known to be one of Dr. Noxon's regular customers, a life member in his pill association.

But Poppa threatened to brain Champe if he didn't see Momma, and he consented to see her if she would call

after dark. Poppa had to drive her there "like a pig to market," he said, and he was more wore out than what she was.

Dr. Champe gave spoon medicines. They were bitter-sweet and sticky, and had no effect whatever except to cause a brief ague of nausea and leave a nasty taste on the tongue.

A third doctor tried massage, another electricity. Momma even flirted with science—science with a capital S. But the optimism that was ladled out to her made her sicker than Dr. Champe's sticky sweet medicine. She was in one of those moods when a cheerful word or a smile is a deadly insult.

The last doctor in town advised a trip, a change of climate and environment. Momma ridiculed the idea, but Poppa telegraphed their married daughter in Terre Haute that Momma was coming, and he fairly boosted her on the train.

Momma was dismal and ashamed of being dumped as a burden on a daughter she had always babied even after Hattie (now Mrs. Fred Eppes) had babies of her own. So the reunion lacked the delight that belonged to the occasion.

Hattie hugged her mother hard and squealed: "Why, Momma, you're looking fine!"

Momma was doleful enough to remember her own woes, and she groaned: "You just say that! I don't feel a bit good and I'm a sight! Don't show me to any of your swell Terra Hut friends, for I'll disgrace you."

Hattie had hard sledding before her. Her mother did not even want to cheer up. She wanted to be sick, and she doubled her misery by bewailing the fact that she couldn't throw off her gloom. She tried to smile once or twice, but Hattie begged her not to.

Since Momma would neither go calling nor receive callers, she was not easy to entertain. She was ashamed of her shabby clothes and her dowdy appearance, and so was Hattie.

Hattie would not admit it, though she did say that Poppa, with all his money, ought to dress her up better.

Poor Poppa had tried to. The average American husband does not often get the chance to complain of his wife's thrift in clothes, but Mr. Lundy, little as he noticed such things, had finally urged Momma to spend a little more money on duds now that the children were buying their own. But his well-meant hints had only depressed her the more, and she had retorted that he was sick and tired of her and her old face.

He had dropped the subject. Hattie had no better success. All that she succeeded in accomplishing was a round of the Terre Haute physicians—especially of those frightful personages known as "specialists." Each of these found his specialty in Momma, and went after it. One of them got away with a large number of her teeth before she could fight him off.

Others offered to remove various parts of her, but she declined to be separated from any more of her fixtures.

She reduced Hattie's general practitioner almost to nervous prostration, and at last, in order to get her off his hands and off her daughter's nerves, he casually recommended a New York specialist, Dr. Courtneidge, who had the monopoly on a very abstruse operation dealing with the pancreas or something that Momma didn't even know she had.

She was quite overawed at finding herself the proud possessor of such a thing. She felt like an old watch that has suddenly learned it has had jewelled movements all these years. But after a few hours of being interested in herself she slumped again and said she guessed she'd take her old pancreas back to Carthage with her. She'd got along with it so far, and, seeing as she'd denied herself a trip to New York all her life for fun, she certainly wa'nt going all that ways to let a doctor poke a knife into her.

Hattie fumed and bullied in vain for a day or two, then she fired off a telegram to Poppa to come over at once.

Poppa was putting through a big land deal and the telegram nearly jolted him out of his wits. He would not wait to extend his option. He ran down to the station

and swung on a train just pulling out. He did not even stop for the collar, toothbrush, and nightgown that constituted his usual going-away equipment.

He spent a horrible night in the smoking car, sleeping among his distorted limbs like a wrecked grasshopper. At Terre Haute he took a taxicab to Hattie's house, and was in such a mental and facial disarray when he rang the bell that the maid who answered it slammed the door on him and ran to tell her mistress that there was a crazy man on the porch.

Hattie peeked through the little side window and recognized her father, and flung open the door and her arms to him.

He expected to find Momma on her deathbed, but she was at breakfast, crying into her rolled oats.

"What on earth is the matter of you, Momma?" he gasped.

"Nothing's the matter of me," she snapped. "What on earth's the matter of you? Had your breakfast? Sed-down! And—Hattie, could you ask your girl to fry him a negg—turned over, you remember; and if the coffee's out, here you can have the rest of mine."

Poppa sank into a chair and consented to break his fast while the news was broken to him. The word "pancreas" dazed him. It sounded like something for breakfast till Hattie explained. Then he was convinced. There is something about a new word that solves all mysteries for most people, and Poppa was very much like most people.

When Hattie had explained that Dr. Appleyard himself had settled upon the pancreas and its malfunctioning, or something like that, as the secret of Momma's indomitable obscurities, Poppa set his jaw.

"When's first train to N'York?" he asked.

"I'm not goin', I tell you," Momma pealed. "I'm not goin' one step."

"You are goin'!" Poppa stormed. "Why ain't you goin'?"

"Because it costs too much money."

That is a thing a man likes to say for himself. He cannot endure to hear anyone else tell it to him. It is in-

sulting. When the children were young, Momma had always said it first when she wanted to make sure of his consenting to an expenditure. Things she would never have browbeaten or wept out of him into permitting, she could always force him to force her to accept by that approach—using the word "force" as card tricksters do when they deftly permit you to drag from them the one card that will work the trick.

But now Momma was not stacking the cards. She had economized for so many decades that money had become a thing sacrosanct. Unwittingly she had dealt Poppa the deadliest humiliation in her power, for he was what Carthage people called "rich"; he had lands and lands in his own and Momma's name, and big sums out on mortgages.

A standard of living that had been forced on him by his early poverty had sufficed him in his gradual wealth.

A new suit of clothes was a nuisance. Extra servants were like unwelcome guests that never went home. The simplest food everlastingly repeated was all his stomach craved.

Momma would as soon have had the measles as a limousine, and jewels on her fingers would have crippled her like inflammatory rheumatism. The changing styles of Paris interested her as much as the tides of Barnegat. She had not changed the manner of wearing her hair since she was a mother for the first time, and her dresses were made by a sewing woman who was more interested in the gossip of the families she moved among than in the daily hints from Paris.

With money pouring in in amounts whose importance neither husband nor wife ever thought of translating into luxuries, and seeping out in a slow trickle, the old couple had come near to being misers without dreaming of stinginess.

This last big land deal of Poppa's had brought him to a sudden realization that he was a pretty big fellow. The banks had begun to turn to him with opportunities for large turnovers, and bonds were offered him in bundles.

And so when Momma implied that a trip to New York,

to save her life maybe, was beyond his means, he was hurt and enraged, and in his anger he rose to an eloquence of gallantry he never would have achieved in a more temperate mood.

"Too much money, hey? You think you can't afford it, do you? Well, let me tell you that I can afford to send you to any town that anybody else can afford to go to. And if that old bankers doctor has got any patients at tall besides millionaires, and if he don't charge more'n a hundred thousand dollars a patient, you can have the best operation he's got in his shop."

Momma braced up a bit at this and gave Hattie a proud look as much as to say: "You haven't married the only successful man in the world, Mrs. Eppes." But she shook her head.

"You ain't goin' to bankrupt yourself shippin' me to any doctor, for I'm not worth it. And that's all there is about it."

"Not worth it?" Poppa cried with the fervor, if not the rhetoric, of a Romeo. "Well, if you ain't worth it, I'd like to know who is? All I got is none too much to spend on you. And if I had ten times as much, what'd it be worth if I lost you, Momma?"

This was so poetic and beautiful that Momma had to get mad or break down and beller, so she put up a big fight.

"Oh, that's all very well for you to say, but what it comes down to is: You're sending me away to die like a dawg outside somewheres; you want to treat me the way they do the old rats that they give a poison to that guarantees they don't die in the house."

"Aw, Momma!" was all Poppa could groan. But Hattie lit into her mother with all the vigor of a true and dutiful American child.

"Why, Momma Lundy! You ought to be ashamed of yourself. You must be out of your mind to talk thataway when Poppa is so nice and so worried."

"That's right! Pick on me!" Momma moaned, taking unfair refuge in cowardly tears. "But I notice nobody is offering to go to New York with me."

Hattie spoke first. "I'd go in a minute if I could leave

the children, but with little Eddie having his tonsils removed to-morrow and Fannie's chicken pox just coming out—"

Poppa sighed. "I'll go, of course, if you want me to."

Momma saw the reluctance in his assent, and, though she knew that he had some strong business reason behind it, her cantankerous mood took umbrage at it. "What'd I tell you? Well, I will go. I'll go all by myself, to some lonely old hotel, and if I never come back nobody will know the difference."

"Of course you shan't go by yourself, honey," Poppa protested. "I was only thinkin' that if I could go home for a while I could set my business to rights and prob'ly close up a big deal I had on when I got Hattie's wire. If I was to put that through, it would net me a couple o' thousand, and that would go a long ways toward paying for your operation, most likely; and then I could come on and be with you whilst you was convalescing; and then, if anything was to happen to me, the business would be all right and I'd leave you and the children fixed."

This was the simple, humble statement of his mind in the matter; that solemn devotion to his work that makes a priestcraft and an art of business. Like all successful creators, he consecrated himself to his work and sacrificed himself to its completion. No poet or sculptor could have a holier or purer ambition for perfection and a flawless conclusion, and there was no more thought of selfishness or greed.

Momma understood and loved him, but the disease in her soul took offense at everything; and, though she realized the unselfishness of his motive, she took a perverse delight in distorting it.

Then ensued one of those duels in which each took the wrong side with a kind of devoted insincerity. Poppa frantically declared that he would go and nothing should stop him, and she as frantically declared that if he went she wouldn't.

Momma insisted that she hadn't a friend on earth or in New York, and she would rather go back and die in her own bed than die alone in New York.

This reminded her distraught husband that she did have a friend in New York, her old playmate, Ella Jemison, who had married Sam Killip and gone to New York and fortune.

"Oh, yes, I'm likely to ask rich folks like her to take me in!" Momma sobbed. "She wouldn't look at me. She's forgotten she ever knew me, though we are kind of second cousins by marriage."

"Well, her husband hasn't forgot he ever knew me," Poppa snapped. "Didn't I have a letter from him only the other day, and didn't he say his wife asked to be kindly remembered to you?"

"Sam Killip wrote to you!" Momma cried. "How'd rich folks like him come to write to you?"

Poppa winced again at being a prophet without honor in his own home. "Oh, I guess he ain't the only rich folks in the world. He said he saw I was a director in the Third National Bank, and he wanted to enlarge his capital, and he could offer me a chance to git in on the ground floor of a patent locomotive stoker he was pushing. He said he was a little short of cash."

"Sam Killip short of cash!"

"Rich folks are always short of cash," Poppa explained. "That's why they're rich. The minute they git any cash they put it into something and make it work. I was going to tell Sam I couldn't see my way clear, but if Ella will look after you a little I'll help him out."

This put a new face on the matter. Instead of going to New York as a decrepit, friendless villager, imploring the pity of an old acquaintance, on whom her only claim was old acquaintanceship, she was offered a chance to float in on her as a bearer of rich gifts. She climbed evenly and thought of the Three Wise Men.

"I'd go there as a kind of a Mrs. Magi then?"

"Yes! Exactly! And I guess she'd treat you like a grand duchess, or something."

"Oh, no, I don't see how I could," Momma sighed, slumping again, too deeply dejected to reach out and pluck the golden apple.

But Poppa had more insight than anyone suspected,

and he had caught the glint of interest in Momma's eye. It was the first sparkle he had seen there for weeks, and, though it had been quenched at once, it emboldened him to tyranny. He got to his feet and left the house with a maddening mysteriousness.

He was inspired to the amazing audacity of calling Mr. Killip on the long-distance telephone. He went to the hotel so that Momma could not interrupt him. When he had his New York victim by the ear he told him the whole story, and Killip, who was still human though a New Yorker, was as effusive in welcoming Momma as in accepting Poppa's additional offer of money enough to stoke the stoker project to a hearty glow.

Poppa went back and told Momma what he had done, and told her to pack up. Her next obstacle was:

"But I got no clo'es here. I'll have to go home and pack, and I just ain't got the strength."

"You got no clothes at home either," Hattie put in. "You can go downtown with me and get you some decent things. You can't go to New York looking like an old farmer."

This was the wrong note. Momma broke her moorings again.

"I told you you was ashamed of me. I'm not fit to be seen in Terra Hut, let alone in New York. I'm simply not going to New York to make an exhibition of myself and make Ellar Killip turn up her nose at me."

This battle had lasted only a few hours longer when a telegram arrived from Ella herself:

Overjoyed dearest Mattie to learn that you will visit New York though greatly distressed to learn of your indisposition you must come to us of course just let me know the train and I will meet you whatever the hour. I know Dr. Courtneidge very well and he is an old darling. Love to you and your husband from us both. ELLA.

The gracious warmth of this brought tears to the eyes of the poor derelict, but she masked her sniffle in a sniff.

"Where'd she learn all those swell words?"

Hattie told her mother, as usual, that she ought to be ashamed of herself, and Momma was.

She prolonged her resistance to the point where Poppa grew desperate enough to groan.

"Well, you do as you're a mind to. Seein' you're strong enough to fight forever, you go home and run the business and I'll go to the hospital my own self."

"Run the business! That's all you think of!" she retorted with a sublime non sequitur. "Put me on the cattle train and ship me off to the slaughter house. Ella still loves me, anyway, even if nobody else does, and she'll see to it I get decently buried, and that's all I got a right to expect."

Poppa dashed out and bathed his hot head in cold water before he went to the ticket office. He nearly bit the head off the agent, just to show that he had some manhood left.

He was never quite the same man again after he got Momma on the train at last. He bade her a despondent farewell, feeling sure that he would never see her again. And, in a sense, he never did. . .

Going to the city for the first time in her life, especially at such a time in her life, was an adventure and a half for Momma.

In spite of the fact that she was advancing toward the knives of a surgeon who was her forlorn hope, she could not but feel a certain elation. She was experiencing what Victor Hugo called a "new shudder."

She was almost more afraid of Ella Killip and her splendor than of the pancreatic specialist. She was fairly smothered with dread of facing the woman she had not seen since Ella was a gangling, noisy, small-town tomboy, all freckles and giggles and gawkiness.

She foresaw Ella as a sort of vast and glittering Queen Victoria, fattened on rich food and studded with jewels. She saw herself as a shabby farm wife whom Ella would probably give one glance and flee from with disdain.

When she reached New York at last, her first struggle

was with a red-capped ruffian who tried to steal her valise. Her next struggle was with her terror of the meeting with Ella. If she had known how to get a train back to Carthage, she would have taken it. But the crowd hustled her up the platform and she lugged a soul heavier than her rusty hand bag.

No one had met her at the train, and she was morbid enough to hope that Ella had missed her. But inside the station she found a crowd held back by a rope, and paused to stare at the staring eyes.

She saw no one that suggested the Ella she had planned, but a tall slim creature, dressed like an actress, in glistening silk, came forward hesitantly. She looked young, and yet she didn't. Her hair was hidden by a hat whose brim seemed to have been flourished by the impatient, whimsical stroke of a painter's brush.

From this dressmaker's model came a voice that startled the valise from Momma's hand, for the voice came out of childhood, and it was the voice of Ella. It sang a new tune, but it was the old voice. It said timidly, tentatively: "Mattie? Is it you?"

Momma's soft old knees caved in, and she sat on the valise as she whimpered: "This is me, but you're never Ellar!"

"Oh, yes, I am, my dear," said Ella with a good laugh as she hoisted Momma to her feet. "I'm the same old sixpence."

"You look more like your own daughter, if you have one."

"Oh, I have one—three, in fact. But—come along, you old dear."

She nodded to a red cap, who took the valise and followed her as she led Momma through the station. Momma's dazed eyes supposed they were taking a short cut through a cathedral.

The Killip limousine was marvelous, but she expected marvels. She was a trifle disappointed when she reached Ella's home. She had expected to drive through a royal park to a palace. But she was put down at a house built jam in among a lot of other houses.

It was not half the size of Momma's house and had no yard at all except a small patch at the back.

In place of a double row of stiff-necked butlers up a grand staircase, there was one very pleasant young man at the door and an awfully nice hired girl in cap and apron. Very friendly she was too, and helped Momma in the most folksy way up to her room.

Ella came along, and when the maid was sent for tea she petted Momma and stuffed a pillow in her back and then drew a chair close up and said: "Now, Mattie dear, tell me all about it. What on earth is the trouble, you poor soul?"

But Momma was so embarrassed by the numberless disparities between herself and this strange creature who had started life with even less advantage that she could not be at ease.

She was dazed by the brilliance of Ella, by her blithe yet haughty carriage, her young skin, slim deft hands, youthful alertness, her fashionable voice, her fashionable politeness.

She saw that Ella's hair was white, now that her hat was off; but her hair was ironed and fluted and polished and dressed as for a fancy dress ball.

Momma summed up her bewildered homage, if it was homage, in one helpless query:

"What makes you powder your hair, Ella?"

Ella laughed aloud. A little of the old boisterousness broke through the years of control.

"As my boys would say: 'Whaddaya mean, "powder my hair"?' That's my own poor old gray wool, damn it!"

Ella's swear word even had a fashionable fillip! Momma had never sworn in her life, or, that is, hardly ever; certainly not with a smile. When she had needed profane words, she had used stupid old-womanish expletives.

But Ella's casual objurgation broke the ice magically. There is nothing that clears the air of formality like a little damn.

Momma was so numb that it merely startled her from her torpor. She laughed the first laugh that had been shaken out of her dust bin of a soul for six weeks.

After that the two old women were themselves again, two girls who had parted and gone round the world two opposite ways and come together at last to exchange experiences. Their costumes and their dialects had changed with their travel, but their hearts were as of old.

Momma had to hear first of Ella's amazing experiences. This desire itself was a miracle of change; she had already forgotten herself for a while.

Ella's husband came home before Ella had finished her Arabian Nights' Entertainment and he was pleasantly surprised and surprising. He had expected Mattie to be more ill than she was and he had not expected her to look at all like his own wife. He knew only too well how expensive Ella's looks were and how different a life she led from the women of the old home town.

The dinner was simple but "awful tasty," as Mattie proclaimed. She was astounded to find herself eating with relish. But the service was irresistible. The amiable gentleman who handed the plates around and took them away was so solicitous about suggesting to her the best morsels that she could not insult him by refusing anything or break his heart by leaving an untouched plate for him to carry away.

Sam Killip was eager to know about all the friends and enemies of his youth and remembered so well the people and the nooks and the scraps of those good old days that the dinner went by like a wedding feast.

Fortunately the Killip children were away at schools and house parties and Momma was not subjected to the inspection of a generation that found even Ella Killip old-fashioned and conservative. When Ella said she had given up trying to keep up with the youngsters, Momma laughed her to scorn with a quaint phrase: "Oh, yes, to hear you tell it!"

After dinner Sam had a meeting of some charitable board, and Ella and Mattie settled down for a confab. Ella neglected to mention that she had sent her opera box

to friends of hers, and she made no allusion to the fact that it was the first performance of a new rôle for Caruso, and she would have given an eyetooth to hear him.

She spread Momma out on what she called a chaise longue. Momma said it was the only comfortable sofa she'd ever laid on and she was going to have one like it if it busted Poppa. Momma was already planning for the future! And thinking of it in terms of comfort!

She was reluctant to discuss her famous illness, but Ella insisted on knowing the worst.

"Well, it simply baffled all the doctors," Momma said in a tone not altogether boastless. "I don't know how to describe it. It's just a kind of gener'l gone-ness. I got no heart for anything—no appatite for my vittles, no int'rest in the house or church work or the heathen or the fambly. I don't want to go to bed nights and I don't want to get up mornings. Always been a fiend on house-keepin', but I don't much care now whether things are in their place or not. Dust don't worry me like it used to. I'm all dusty myself. No special aches or pains, but I just don't feel good anywheres.

"Want to cry all the time and I don't know why. Hate to go outdoors and hate to stay in. Poppa drives me nearly crazy with everything he does and says, but I drive myself crazier still. I ain't friends with myself or anybody. Want to die and can't bear the thought of that either.

"It's just a kind of all wrongness everywhere, if you can make anything out of that."

To her amazement, Ella said: "I know just how you feel and you've come to the right place to be cured."

It was not altogether pleasant to have Ella claim a share in Momma's wonderful disease and to speak so off-handedly of its cure. But instead of rebuking Ella for presuming and for minimizing the crisis, Momma felt relieved and before long she was yawning nobly and confessing that she could not keep her eyes open. Ella went to her room with her and saw her bestowed, then kissed her good night and left her. Momma noted that her valise

had been unpacked, her bed opened, her nightgown and slippers laid out, a water bottle set by the reading lamp on a little table by the bedhead, and a dozen little thoughtfulnesses executed in her behalf.

When she was in her old nightgown, which was modeled on the potato-bag pattern, and had said her prayers, she crept into the disgracefully fine linen sheets and slept in luxurious oblivion for nine good hours.

She did not know that Ella had sneaked into her own room, dressed swiftly, and stolen out to the opera, where she stood up, and that she went to a supper and there danced a while before she sneaked home.

Momma had her breakfast in bed at Ella's previous order and wandered about the house for hours before Ella had rung for her breakfast and sent for Momma.

Ella was a sight. She looked like one of those immor'l French kings' favorites. She had on a lace boudoir cap and a silk nightgown, very deckolett, and a "breakfast jacket" (of all things!) of satin and lace.

She did look handsome. Momma had always hated to have even Poppa see her before breakfast. She began to be a little eager for her cure.

"When do I go to see this Dr. Courtneidge?"

Ella hesitated a moment, then spoke with a certain sternness:

"There are two or three things that have to be done first, Mattie dear. I'm always a beast up till noon, so you mustn't be surprised if I'm brutally frank now. Dr. Courtneidge is a very fussy and snappy old gentleman. He has only swells for patients and he's very particular."

"Don't he treat poor folks at tall?" Momma gasped.

"Oh, yes, he has free clinics and hospitals and all that and does half his work for nothing. That's why he's so particular with his pay patients. You've got to go through a course of sprouts and buy some things or you'll never get near him.

"His reception room is full of people, and you'd feel terribly embarrassed to wait there till he gets round. So you really must have some of this year's clothes and a 1920 hat. And your hair—you mustn't be offended,

Mattie, dear, but really your hair and your skin! He'd give you one glance and send you away without an examination even. You see, I know him.

"And then the examination, Mattie dear—well, you know what that's like. And in the hospital—well! I saw the nightgown laid out on your pillow and that sort of thing would simply frighten the doctor to death. He really couldn't operate."

"I'm not looking to marry the old fool," Momma mumbled. "I got one husband a'ready."

"I know, my dear Mattie, but your one husband put you in my charge and I'm going to see you through. My masseuse is coming to my house this morning. She's downstairs now, I imagine, and I'm going to have her begin on you. When she's finished, my hairdresser, François, will get to work on that dear old poll of yours and take off about forty years of age. Then we'll have lunch and go shopping."

Momma was choked with wrath, but Ella would neither fight nor plead. She just bullied her with laughter, and Momma, feeling like a convict unjustly imprisoned, set her jaws and resolved to go through with the sentence. She revolted, however, at the insolence of the masseuse—and her exclamations of horror at the neglect of a "skin that had never really been cleaned."

But the wretch silenced Momma's indignation with the indignity of smeared cold cream, and smothered her with hot towels and cold towels, and with lotions of every odor and smart.

Momma would not speak to her as she left, but when she scowled at the mirror, she gazed at the new face aghast it flung back at her. The dull parchment of her skin had become a living integument with a kind of dreamy radiance alive in it.

Momma felt bewitched. She would have sworn that the image in the looking-glass smiled first at her and nodded, compelling her to smile back and nod in return. She hung there fascinated, understanding a little of what Narcissus felt when he looked first in the pool.

Then a quiet Frenchman was shown in. He overawed Momma by his dignity and his dexterity. She dared not slap his face when he spoke of her hair as a crime. He called it a "cream," but she understood his shoulders.

And then he attacked her poor head with ferocious familiarity. If Poppa had ever caught him, and her, he'd certainly have shot them both.

Momma was in for it, however, and she actually permitted this strange man, this appalling foreigner, to take down her hair, drench it, soap it, souse her head in water, pour curious smelly things over her scalp, and rinse them out, massage her occiput, comb and pull and torture and iron her hair and dress it on top of her astounded skull in what he called a "French twist." She spent a whole hour of "feeling like a shirt in a steam laundry," as she afterward expressed it. Then he brandished before her a mirror and uttered a triumphant cry of something that sounded like:

"Ah, my damn, walla, walla!"

Momma blushed vermilion and felt as immoral as she looked. Yet not at all remorseful, somehow. Fortunately Franswa dashed out to prepare the hair of Ella, leaving Momma to ponder her new face and her new hair with a new soul.

She felt that, in Hattie's formula, she ought to be ashamed of herself, but, to save her immortal being, she could not.

Only one thing she was sure of, and that was that that head and that hair did not belong on top of that old dress of hers. Her one "best dress" was the one worst dress she had ever seen.

When at length she saw Ella, Ella screamed with delight at the transformation and said something that rimed:

*Grow old along with me,
The best is yet to be.*

The afternoon was spent in shopping for what Ella called "landjerree."

Until she had the proper underpinnings, Ella simply refused to buy Mattie the new dress and hat she was already clamoring for.

The amount of Poppa's money that Ella spent on silken shamelessness dazed Momma, but Ella would not be checked, and Momma was too childishly interested in the new doll rags to make more than a show of resistance.

Ella said: "If your husband has money enough to waste ten thousand dollars on my husband's foolish investments, he has money enough to buy you some decent underclothes."

"Did you say 'decent'?" was Momma's feeble disclaimer, but she barely muttered it.

That night, on a plea of going to bed early, Momma locked herself in her room and tried on the new things. She nearly died of palpitation of the heart when she stood up in silk stockings, satin mules, and in a new streamline corset that gave her a figure! A heroic figure indeed, but a shape, a contour, that was not altogether an insult to the Creator who fashioned it. Momma had to give it a religious significance to live through it.

And why not? What instinct is more deeply implanted in womanhood than the immemorial insatiable lust for pretty things? It has resisted the immemorial insatiable lust of preachers and satirists for insulting it, of economists and hardworking men for denouncing it. It has been called every contemptuous and cruel name in every language. Laws have been made against it innumerable, in vain. And it has flourished as unconquerably as violets in moss, as perfume in hyacinths, as bright plumage in birds, and ornate sunsets in western skies.

The weavers of silk and the needlers of laces, the designers of gowns and of hats have kept up their beautiful careers despite the thunders of self-styled virtue and the slanders of all times.

Poets and prosers and painters who have turned less beautiful lines and have married less beautiful colors, and the critics who have celebrated their achievements, have looked down with disdain on those who have devoted

their inspirations and their toil to the creation of felicitous decorations for the living body.

But the women have known better. They never have despised the artists who improved them and enhanced them; and by hook or by crook they have kept those artists alive and blessed them with fame.

And again why not? The pietists and the Puritans who cannot forgive women for trying to be beautiful, do they not belie their own gods in their own barbaric praise of ugliness?

"O Justice, what crimes are committed in thy name!" And, O Beauty, what crimes in thine! Yet beauty shall not die nor the love of ornament, and those who hate them cannot prove their right to cast a stone. Frightful extravagances and cruelties are the result of the hunger for beauty and the feeding of that appetite, but this is true of every other religion and law and ideal.

If everybody who dressed plainly and lived without luxury, gave all he saved or she did not spend to the poor, their miserliness might be justified, but everybody knows that this is not so.

Beauty is generous. She who is pleased with herself is already hospitable, and until the millennium is here those who have not the energy or the wile to get fine clothes and wear them well may content themselves as best they can by watching the well-bedecked go by.

And who is he so mean of soul that he would decree the extinction of the custom women have of making themselves as pleasing to the eye as possible? And what benefits would the vandal confer on bedulled mankind?

Momma at least was not of that humor. She had become a girl again at heart. She could never be again the gracile nymph who had turned the heads of Carthage swains with her flesh of apple-blossom hue, her fleecy hair in its ribbons, and her gay body in its winsome fabrics.

But she could be a splendid white-haired matron; and that age has a nobler beauty and a grander charm than even youth can give, youth so common and so helpless in its grace.

When Momma walked by chance in front of the long cheval glass, she fell back with a sob of fear and shame. But she approached again and studied herself. She stood up straight, lifting her head proudly on her throat, her torso on her hips; holding herself stalwart as an empress.

And she thanked God for what He had given her, and promised Him she would take better care of the chalice of her soul. And a happiness possessed her like a benediction.

The next day she went forth to buy dresses, not mere tents to hide her shapeless body under, colored bags to cover her lumps and bulges from the casual and unlingering eye, but exquisite masterpieces from skilled looms, piously accepting the human form and developing its graces.

Ella was not fool enough to put kittenish anachronisms of dress on Momma. She made her look herself at her supreme.

And the slithy mannequins who stood about raved over the miracle that had been accomplished in turning the dowdy peasant that entered the shop into a high-bred dowager who smiled upon an approving mirror.

Momma's only grief was that she could not wear any of the gowns out on the street at once. She had a frantic desire to prance up Fifth Avenue without delay. But there were alterations to make, and she must wait.

And so must Dr. Courtneidge.

She took the delay as her punishment for having put off so long the day of her at-one-ment with her better self.

The afternoon was spent among the milliners. Glittering countesses in black satin came and went with hats like coronets. They set them daintily on Momma's turreted hair and lifted them away again. Momma sat up so straight that she felt taller sitting down than she had seemed hitherto reaching for a pantry shelf.

It was unbelievable how much it changed her face to change her hat. She cowered in horror from beneath some of the brims, but others so caught her up into the

clouds that they amounted to translation—apotheosis almost.

In spite of Ella's cries of protest, she bought five of the costliest and wore one of them away.

She went to bed prostrated. But it was the prostration of a girl come home from a great ball, worn out with rapture and pursued by remembered music.

Poppa had not heard a word of Momma since the telegram she sent him saying that she had arrived and been met and was awful tired and discouraged.

When no letters came he was sure that she was up to her old trick of concealing the worst from him as long as possible. He was sure that she was in the hospital, delirious with pain and on her way to the grave. His heart went mad with visions of her loss and of the dismal life without her.

On another of his impulses he took a train for New York, sending a brief telegram to Ella.

He got off the train in much the desolate mood that had dejected Momma when she arrived. He also resisted the redcap and trudged dolefully to the line where people waited behind the rope. And up to him also came a gorgeous creature whom he did not recognize until he heard the ancient voice.

"Poppa, don't you know me?"

The voice was Momma's, but since when was she a tsarina off the throne? He, too, dropped his handbag and collapsed. And she lifted him and murmured as she kissed him:

"Don't you like me?"

"I don't know you," he faltered.

But he kissed her suave and fragrant cheek again and looked into the gleaming eyes of the bride he remembered out of the long ago.

Then he began to laugh in great gulps of blissful anguish, like a boy who has found on the Christmas tree a richer gift than he had ever dreamed of, or dared to ask.

Momma cried too. But such a different wail from the wails he had heard from her of late!

Finally Poppa thought that he must give credit for the redemption where it was due.

"That Dr. Courtneidge is certainly a wonder. What on earth did he do to you?"

"I haven't seen him yet," said Momma. "And I'm not goin' to. I've taken what Ella calls the 'hat cure' and all the other clothes cures. And they haven't cost much more than old Courtneidge would have charged."

Poppa felt very uneasy walking along with Momma in all her glittering glory. He had always loved her. Now he felt proud of her with the goodly pride of a man who has the luck to get a beautiful wife and the brains to keep her beautiful.

The only fly in the great bowl of ointment was himself, his shabby self. He confessed as much.

"I'm ashamed to be seen with you, Momma."

"You won't be after I get through taking you to the tailor's and the other places I'm goin' to take you to. This is our second honeymoon, Poppa. We didn't have any trousseau at all before, but we're going to make up for it now. I think I'll telegraph for Hattie and give her a look, just so's to hear her say: 'Why, Momma, you ought to be ashamed of yourself!'"

"I guess you'd oughta, at that," Poppa guffawed.

And as she swept into Ella's limousine like a Roman empress entering a chariot, Momma tittered:

"I am! I'm so ashamed of myself, I'm proud of it!"

Cosmopolitan Magazine

BACK PAY

BY

FANNIE HURST

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By FANNIE HURST

I SET out to write a love-story, and for the purpose sharpened a bright-pink pencil with a glass ruby frivolously at the eraser end.

Something sweet. Something dainty. A candied rose-leaf after all is the bitter war-lozenges. A miss. A kiss. A golf-stick. A motor-car. Or, if need be, a bit of khaki, but without one single spot of blood or mud, and nicely pressed as to those fetching peg-top trouser effects where they wing out just below the skirt-coat. The oldest story in the world told newly. No wear out to it. Editors know. It's as staple as eggs or printed lawn or ipecac. The good old-fashioned love story with the above-mentioned miss, kiss and, if need be for the sake of timeliness, the bit of khaki, pressed.

Just my luck that, with one of these most salable tales in the world at the tip of my pink pencil, Hester Bevins should come pounding and clamoring at the door of my mental reservation, quite drowning out the rather high, the lippy, and, if I do say it myself, distinctly musical patter of Arline. That was to have been her name. Arline Kildane. Sweet, don't you think, and with just a bit of wild Irish rose in it?

But Hester Bevins would not let herself be gainsaid, sobbing a little, elbowing her way through the group of mental unborns, and leaving me to blow my pitch-pipe for a minor key.

Not that Hester's isn't one of the oldest stories in the world, too. No matter how newly told, she is as old as

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sin, and sin is but a few weeks younger than love—and how often the two are interchangeable!

There is another Hester in fiction who wore a literal scarlet letter, but she is sprung from the brain of genius, from whence all immortal brain-children are born. My poor Hester is of far less fertile gray matter, but here she is as she is.

If it be a fact that the true lady is, in theory, either a virgin or a lawful wife, then Hester Bevins stands immediately convicted on two charges.

She was neither. The most that can be said for her is that she was honestly what she was.

"If the wages of sin is death," she said to a road-house party of roysterers one dawn, "then I've quite a bit of back pay coming to me." And joined in the shout that rose off the table.

I can sketch her in for you rather simply because of the hackneyed lines of her very, very old story. Whose pasts so quickly mold and disintegrate as those of women of Hester's stripe? Their yesterdays are entirely soluble in the easy waters of their to-days.

For the first seventeen years of her life, she lived in what we might call Any American Town of, say, fifteen or twenty thousand inhabitants. Her particular one was in Ohio. Demopolis, I think. One of those change-engine-and-take-on-water stops with a stucco art-nouveau station, a roof drooping all round it, as if it needed to be shaved off like edges of a pie, and the name of the town writ in conch shells on a green slant of terrace. You know—the kind that first establishes a ten-o'clock curfew for its young, its dance-halls, and motion-picture theaters, and then sends in a hurry call for a social-service expert from one of the large Eastern cities to come and diagnose its malignant vice undergrowth.

Hester Bevins, of a mother who died bearing her and one of those disappearing fathers who can speed away after the accident without even stopping to pick up the child or leave a license-number, was reared—no; grew up, is better—in the home of an aunt. A blond

aunt with many gold teeth and many pink and blue wrappers.

Whatever Hester knew of the kind of home that fostered her, it left apparently no welt across her sensibilities. It was a rather poor house, an unpainted frame in a poor street, but there was never a lack of gaiety or, for that matter, any pinching lack of funds. It was an actual fact that, at thirteen, cotton or lisle stockings brought out a little irritated rash on Hester's slim young legs, and she wore silk. Abominations, it is true, at three pair for a dollar, that sprung runs and would not hold a darn, but, just the same, they were silk. There was an air of easy *camaraderie* and easy money about that house. It was not unusual for her to come home from school at high noon and find a front-room group of one, two, three, or four guests, almost invariably men. Frequently these guests handed her out as much as half a dollar for candy-money, and not another child in school reckoned in more than pennies.

Once, a guest, for reasons of odd change, I suppose, handed her out thirteen cents. Outraged perhaps at the meanness of the sum, and with an early and deep-dyed superstition of thirteen, she dashed the coins out of his hand and to the four corners of the room, escaping in the guffaw of laughter that went up.

Often her childish sleep in a small top room with slanting sides would be broken upon by loud ribaldry that lasted into dawn, but never by word, and certainly not by deed, was she to know from her aunt any of its sordid significance.

Literally, Hester Bevins was left to feather her own nest. There were no demands made upon her. Once, in the little atrocious front parlor of horsehair and chromo, one of the guests, the town baggage-master, to be exact, made to embrace her, receiving from the left rear a sounding smack across cheek and ear from the aunt.

"Cut that! Hester, go out and play! Whatever she's got to learn from life, she can't say she learned it in my house."

There were even two years of high school, and at sixteen, when she went, at her own volition, to clerk in Finley's two story department store on High Street, she was still innocent, although she and Gerald Fishback were openly sweethearts.

Gerald was a Thor. Of course, you are not to take that literally; but if ever there was a carnification of the great god himself, then Gerald was in his image. A wide streak of the Scandinavian ran through his make-up, although he had been born in Middletown, and from there had come recently to the Finley Dry Goods Company as an accountant.

He was so the viking in his bigness that once, on a picnic, he had carried two girls, screaming their fun, across twenty feet of stream. Hester was one of them.

It was at this picnic, the Finley annual, that he asked Hester, then seventeen, to marry him. She was darkly, wildly pretty, as a rambler rose tugging at its stem is restlessly pretty, as a pointed little gazelle smelling up at the moon is whimsically pretty, as a runaway stream from off the flank of a river is naughtily pretty, and she wore a crisp percale shirt-waist with a saucy bow at the collar, fifty-cent silk stockings, and already she had almond incarnadine nails with points to them.

They were in the very heart of Wallach's Grove, under a natural cathedral of trees, the noises of the revelers and the small explosions of soda-water and beer-bottles almost remote enough for perfect quiet. He was stretched his full and splendid length at the picnickers' immemorial business of plucking and sucking grass blades, and she seated very trimly, her little blue-serge skirt crawling up ever so slightly to reveal the silken ankle, on a rock beside him.

"Tickle-tickle!" she cried, with some of that irrepressible animal spirit of hers, and leaning to brush his ear with a twig.

He caught at her hand.

"Hester," he said, "marry me."

She felt a foaming through her until her finger-tips sang.

"Well, I like that!" was what she said, though, and flung up a pointed profile that was like that same gazelle's smelling the moon.

He was very darkly red, and rose to his knees to clasp her about the waist. She felt like relaxing back against his blondness and feeling her fingers plow through the great double wave of his hair. But she did not.

"You're too poor," she said.

He sat back without speaking for a long minute.

"Money isn't everything," he said finally, and with something gone from his voice.

"I know," she said, looking off; "but it's a great deal if you happen to want it more than anything else in the world."

"Then, if that's how you feel about it, Hester, next to wanting you, I want it, too, more than anything else in the world."

"There's no future in bookkeeping."

"I know a fellow in Cincinnati who's a hundred-and-fifty-dollar man. Hester? Dear?"

"A week?"

"Why, of course not, dear—a month."

"Faugh!" she said, still looking off.

He felt out for her hand, at the touch of her reddening up again.

"Hester," he said, "you're the most beautiful, the most exciting, the most maddening, the most—the most everything girl in the world! You're not going to have an easy time of it, Hester, with your—your environment and your dangerousness, if you don't settle down—quick, with some strong fellow to take care of you. A fellow who loves you. That's me, Hester. I want to make a little home for you and protect you. I can't promise you the money—right off, but I can promise you the bigger something from the very start. From the very start, Hester. Dear?"

She would not let her hand relax to his.

"I hate this town," she said.

"There's Cincinnati. Maybe my friend could find an opening there."

"Faugh!"

"Cincinnati dear, is a metropolis."

"No, no! You don't understand. I hate littleness. Even little metropolises. Cheapness. I hate little towns and little spenders and mercerized stockings and cotton lisle next to my skin, and machine-stitched nightgowns—ugh; it scratches!"

"And I—I just love you in those starched white shirt-waists, Hester. You're beautiful."

"That's just the trouble. It satisfies you, but it suffocates me. I've got a pink-crêpe-de-Chine soul. Pink crêpe de Chine—you hear?"

He sat back on his heels.

"It—is it true, then, Hester that—that you're making up with that Jewish traveling salesman from New York?"

"Why!" she said, coloring. "Why, I've only met him twice walking up High Street evenings!"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester?"

"Say, who was answering your questions this time last year?"

"But it is true, isn't it, Hester? Isn't it?"

"Well, of all the nerve!"

But it was.

The rest tells glibly. The Jewish salesman, who wore blue-and-white-striped soft collars with a bar pin across the front, does not even enter the story. He was only a stepping-stone. From him, the ascent, or descent, or whatever you choose to call it, was quick and sheer.

Five years later, Hester was the very private, the very exotic, manicured, coiffured, scented, svelt, and strictly *de-luxe* chattel of one Charles G. Wheeler, of New York city and Rosencranz, Long Island, vice-president of the Standard Tractor Company, a member of no clubs but of the Rosencranz church, three lodges, and several corporations.

You see, there is no obvious detail lacking. Yes; there was an apartment. "Flat" it becomes under their kind of tenancy, situated on the windiest bend of Riverside Drive and minutely true to type from the pale-blue and

brocade Verni Martin parlor of talking-machine, mechanical piano, and cellarette built to simulate a music cabinet, to the pink-brocaded bedroom with a *chaise longue* piled high with a small mountain of lace pillow-ettes that were liberally interlarded with paper-bound novels, and a spacious, white-marble adjoining bathroom with a sunken tub, rubber-sheeted shower, white-enamel weighing scales and over-loaded medicine-chest of cosmetic array in frosted bottles, sleeping-, headache-, sedative powders, *et al.* There were also a negro maid, two Pomeranian dogs, and last, but by no means least, a private telephone enclosed in a hall closet and lighted by an electric bulb that turned on automatically to the opening of the door.

There was nothing sinister about Wheeler. He was a rather fair exponent of that amazing genus known as "typical New Yorker," a roll of money in his pocket, and a roll of fat at the back of his neck. He went in for light checked suits, wore a platinum-and-Oriental-pearl chain across his waistcoat, and slept at a Turkish bath once a week; was once named in a large corporation scandal, escaping indictment only after violent and expensive skirmishes, could be either savage or familiar with waiters, wore highly manicured nails, which he regarded frequently in public, white-silk socks only, and maintained, on a twenty-thousand-a-year scale in the decorous suburb of Rosencranz, a decorous wife and three children, and, like all men of his code, his ethics were strictly double-decked. He would not permit his nineteen-year-old daughter Marion so much as a shopping-tour to the city without the chaperonage of her mother or a friend, forbade in his wife, a comely enough woman with a white unmarcelled coiffure and upper arms a bit baggy with withering flesh, even the slightest of shirt-waist V's unless filled in with net, and kept up, at an expense of no less than fifteen thousand a year—thirty the war-year that tractors jumped into the war-industry class—the very high-priced, -tempered, -handled, and -stepping Hester of wild-gazelle charm.

Not that Hester stepped much. There were a long

underslung roadster and a great tan limousine with yellow-silk curtains at the call of her private telephone.

The Wheeler family used, not without complaint, a large open car of very early vintage, which in winter was shut in with flapping curtains with isinglass peepers, and leaked cold air badly.

On more than one occasion they passed on the road—these cars. The long tan limousine with the shock-absorbers, foot-warmers, two brown Pomeranian dogs, little case of enamel-top bottles, fresh flowers, and outside this little jewel-case interior, smartly exposed, so that the blast hit him from all sides, a chauffeur in uniform that harmonized nicely with the tans and yellows. And then the grotesque caravan of the Azoic motor-age, with its flapping curtains and ununiformed youth in visored cap at the wheel.

There is undoubtedly an unsavory aspect to this story. For purpose of fiction, it is neither fragrant nor easily digested. But it is not so unsavory as the social scheme which made it possible for those two cars to pass thus on the road, and, at the same time, Charles G. Wheeler to remain the unchallenged member of the three lodges, the corporations, and the Rosencranz church, with a memorial window in his name on the left side as you enter, and again his name spelled out on a brass plate at the end of a front pew.

No one but God and Mrs. Wheeler knew what was in her heart. It is possible that she did not know what the world knew, but hardly. That she endured it is not admirable, but then there were the three children, and, besides, she lived in a world that let it go at that. And so she continued to hold up her head in her rather poor, mute way, rode beside her husband to funerals, weddings, and to the college commencement of their son at Yale. Scrimped a little, cried a little, prayed a little in private, but outwardly lived the life of the smug in body and soul.

But the Wheelers' is another story, also a running social sore; but it was Hester, you remember, who came sobbing and clamoring to be told—and so back to her.

As Wheeler once said of her, she was a darn-fine clothes-horse. There was no pushed-up line of flesh across the middle of her back, as the corsets did it to Mrs. Wheeler. She was honed to the ounce. The white-enameled weighing scales, the sweet oils, the flexible fingers of her masseur, the dumb-bells, the cabinet, salt-water, needle-spray, and vapor-baths saw to that. Her skin, unlike Marion Wheeler's, was unfreckled, and as heavily and tropically white as a magnolia leaf, and, of course, she reddened her lips, and the moonlike pallor came out more than ever.

As I said, she was frankly what she was. No man looked at her more than once without knowing it. To use an awkward metaphor, it was before her face like an overtone; it was an invisible caul. The wells of her eyes were muddy with it.

But withal, she commanded something of a manner, even from Wheeler. He had no key to the apartment. He never entered her room without knocking. There were certain of his friends she would not tolerate, from one or another aversion, to be party to their not infrequent carousals. Men did not always rise from their chairs when she entered a room, but she suffered few liberties from them. She was absolutely indomitable in her demands.

"Lord!" ventured Wheeler, upon occasion across a Sunday-noon, lace-spread breakfast-table, when she was slim and cool-fingered in orchid-colored draperies, and his newest gift of a six-carat, pear-shaped diamond blazing away on her right hand. "Say, aren't these Yvette bills pretty steep?"

"One midnight-blue-and-silver gown.....	\$485.00
One blue-and-silver head bandeau.....	50.00
One serge-and-satin trotteur gown.....	275.00
One ciel-blue tea-gown.....	280.00

"Is that the cheapest you can drink tea? Whew!"
She put down her coffee-cup which she usually held

with one little finger poised elegantly outward as if for flight.

"You've got a nerve!" she said, rising and pushing back her chair. "Over whose ticker are you getting quotations that I come cheap?"

He was immediately conciliatory, rising also to enfold her in an embrace that easily held her slightness.

"Go on," he said. "You could work me for the Woolworth Building in diamonds if you wanted it badly enough."

"Funny way of showing it! I may be a lot of things, Wheeler, but I'm not cheap. You're darn lucky that the war is on and I'm not asking for a French car."

He crushed his lips to hers.

"You devil!" he said.

There were frequent parties. Dancing at Broadway cabarets. All-night joy rides, punctuated with road-house stop-overs and not infrequently, in groups of three or four couples, ten-day pilgrimages to showy American spas.

"Getting boiled out," they called it. It was part of Hester's scheme for keeping her sveltness.

Her friendships were necessarily rather confined to a definite circle—within her own apartment-house, in fact. On the floor above, also in large, bright rooms of high rental, and so that they were exchanging visits frequently during the day, often *en déshabille*, using the stairway that wound up round the elevator-shaft, lived a certain Mrs. Kitty Drew, I believe she called herself. She was plump and blond, and so very scented that her aroma lay on a hallway for an hour after she had scurried through it. She was well known and chiefly distinguished by a large court-plaster crescent which she wore on her left shoulder-blade. She enjoyed the bounty of a Wall Street broker who for one day had attained the conspicuousness of cornering the egg-market.

There were two or three others within this group. A Mrs. Denison, half French, and a younger girl called Babe. But Mrs. Drew and Hester were intimates. They twaddled daily in one or the other's apartments,

usually lazy and lacy with negligée, lounging about on the mounds of lingerie pillows over chocolates, cigarettes, novels, Pomeranians, and always the headache-powders, nerve-sedatives, or smelling-salts, a running line of "Lord, I've a head!" "I need a good cry for the blues!" "Talk about a dark-brown taste," or, "There was some kick to those cocktails last night," through their conversation.

KITTY: Br-r-r! I'm as nervous as a cat to-day.

HESTER: Naughty, naughty bad doggie to bite muvver's diamond ring.

KITTY: Leave it to you to land a pear-shaped diamond on your hooks.

HESTER: He fell for it, just like that!

KITTY: You could milk a billiard-ball.

HESTER: I don't see any "quality of mercy" to spare around your flat.

There were the two years of high school, you see.

"Ed's going out to Geyser Springs next month for the cure. I told him he could not go without me unless over my dead body, he could not."

"Geyser Springs. That's thirty miles from my home town."

"Your home town? Nighty-night! I thought you was born on the corner of Forty-second street and Broadway with a lobster claw in your mouth."

"Demopolis, Ohio."

"What is that—a skin-disease?"

"My last relation in the world died out there two years ago. An aunt. Wouldn't mind some Geyser Springs myself if I could get some of this stiffness out of my joints."

"Come on, I dare you! May Denison and Chris will come in on it, and Babe can always find somebody. Make it three, or four cars full and let's motor out. We all need a good boiling, anyways. Wheeler looks about ready for spontaneous combustion, and I got a twinge in my left little toe. You on?"

"I am, if he is."

"If he is! He'd fall for life in an Igorrote village with a ring in his nose if you wanted it."

And truly enough, it did come about that on a height-of-the-season evening, a highly cosmopolitan party of four couples trooped into the solid-marble foyer of the Geyser Springs Hotel, motor-coated, goggled, veiled; a whole litter of pigskin and patent-leather bags, hampers, and hat-boxes, two golf-bags, two Pomeranians, a bull in spiked collar, furs, leather coats, monogrammed rugs, thermos bottles, air-pillows, robes, and an ensemble of fourteen wardrobe-trunks sent by express.

They took the "cure." Rode horseback, motored, played roulette at the casino for big stakes, and eschewed the American plan of service for the smarter European idea, with a special à-la-carte menu for each meal. Extraordinary-looking mixed drinks, and strictly against the mandates of the "cure," appeared at their table. Strange midnight goings-on were reported by the more conservative hotel guests, and the privacy of their circle was allowed full integrity by the little veranda groups of gouty ladies or middle-aged husbands with liver-spots on their faces. The bath-attendants reveled in the largest tips of the season. When Hester walked down the large dining-room evenings, she was a signal for the craning of necks for the newest shock of her newest extreme toilette. The kinds of toilettes that shocked the women into envy and mental notes of how the under arm was cut, and the men into covert delight. Wheeler liked to sit back and put her through her paces like a high-strung filly.

"Make 'em sit up, girl! You got them all looking like dimes around here."

One night, she descended to the dining-room in a black evening gown so daringly lacking in back and yet, withal, so slimly perfect an elegant thing that an actual breathlessness hung over the hall, the clatter of dishes pausing.

There was a gold bird of paradise dipped down her hair over one shoulder, trailing its smoothness like fingers of lace. She defied with it as she walked.

"Take it from me," said Kitty, who felt fat in lavender that night, "she's going it one too strong."

Another evening, she descended, always last, in a cloth

of silver, with a tiny, an absurd, an impeccably tight silver turban dipped down over one eye, and absolutely devoid of jewels except the pear-shaped diamond on her left forefinger.

They were a noisy, a spending, a cosmopolitan crowd of too well-fed men and too well-groomed women, ignored by the veranda groups of wives and mothers, openly dazzling and arousing a tremendous curiosity in the younger set, and quite obviously sought after by their own kind.

But Hester's world, too, is all run through with sharply defined, social schisms.

"I wish that Irwin woman wouldn't always hang round our crowd," she said, one morning, as she and Kitty lay side by side in the cooling-room after their baths, massages, manicures, and shampoos. "I don't want to be seen running with her."

"Did you see the square emerald she wore last night?"

"Fake. I know the clerk at the Synthetic Jewelry Company had it made up for her. She's cheap, I tell you. Promiscuous. Who ever heard of anybody standing back of her. She knocks around. She sells her old clothes to Tessie, my manicurist. I've got a line on her. She's cheap."

Kitty, who lay with her face under a white mud of cold-cream and her little mouth merely a hole, turned on her elbow.

"We can't all be top-notchers, Hester," she said. "You're hard as nails."

"I guess I am, but you've got to be to play this game. The ones who aren't end up by stuffing the keyhole and turning on the gas. You've got to play it hard or not at all. If you've got the name, you might as well have the game."

"If I had it to do over again—well, there would be one more wife-and-mother rôle being played in this little old world, even if I had to play it on a South Dakota farm."

"Whatever is worth doing is worth doing well,' I used to write in the copy-book. Well, that's the way I feel about this: To me, anything is worth doing to escape

the cotton stockings and lisle next to your skin. I admit I never sit down and *think*. You know, sit down and take stock of myself. What's the use thinking? Live! Yes," mused Hester, her arms in a wreath over her head, "I think I'd do it all over again. There's not been so many at that. Three. The first was a Jew. He'd have married me, but I couldn't see it on six thousand a year. Nice fellow, too—an easy spender in a small way, but I couldn't see a future to ladies' neckwear. They make good husbands, Jews do. I hear he made good later in munitions. Al was a pretty good sort, too, but tight. How I hate tightness! I've been pretty lucky in the long run, I guess."

"Did I say 'hard as nails'?" said Kitty, grotesquely fitting a cigarette in the aperture of her mouth. "I apologize. Why, alongside of you, a piece of flint is morning cereal. Haven't you ever had a love-affair? I've been married twice—that's how chicken-hearted I can be. Haven't you ever pumped a little faster just because a certain some one walked into the room?"

"Once."

"Once what?"

"I liked a fellow. Pretty much. A blond. Say, he was blond! I always think to myself, Kit—next to Gerald you've got the bluest eyes under heaven. Only, his didn't have any dregs."

"Thanks, dearie."

"I sometimes wonder about Gerald. I ought to drive over while we're out here. Poor old Gerald Fishback!"

"Sweet name—'Fishback.' No wonder you went wrong, dearie."

"Oh, I'm not getting soft. I saw my bed and made it, nice and soft and comfy, and I'm lying on it without a whimper."

"You just bet your life you made it up nice and comfy! You've the right idea; I have to hand that to you. You command respect from them. Lord! Ed would as soon fire a teacup at me as not. But, with me, it pays. The last one he broke he made up to me with my opal-and-diamond beetle."

"Wouldn't wear an opal if it was set next to the Hope diamond."

"Superstitious, dearie?"

"Unlucky. Never knew it to fail."

"Not a superstition in my bones. I don't believe in walking under ladders or opening an umbrella in the house or sitting down with thirteen, but, Lordy, never saw the like with you! Thought you'd have the hysterics over that little old vanity mirror you broke that day out at the races."

"Br-r-r; I hated it."

"Lay easy, dearie. Nothing can touch you the way he's raking in the war-contracts."

"Great—isn't it?"

"Play for a country home, dearie. I always say real estate and jewelry are something in the hand. Look ahead in this game, I always say."

"You just bet I've looked ahead."

"So have I, but not enough."

"Somehow, I never feel afraid. I could get a job tomorrow if I had to."

"Say, dearie, if it comes to that, with twenty pounds off me, there's not a chorus I couldn't land back in."

"I worked once, you know, in Lichtig's import shop."

"Fifth Avenue."

"Yes. It was in between the Jew and Al. I sold two thousand five hundred dollars' worth of gowns the first week."

"Sure enough?"

"'Girl,' old man Lichtig said to me the day I quit; 'girl,' he said, 'if ever you need this job again, come back; it's waiting.'"

"Fine chance!"

"I've got the last twenty-five dollars I earned pinned away this minute in the pocket of the little dark-blue suit I wore to work. I paid for that suit with my first month's savings. A little dark-blue Norfolk, Lichtig let me have out of a stock for twenty-seven fifty."

"Were they giving them away with a pound of tea?"

"Honest, Kitty, it was neat. Little white shirt-waist,

tan shoes, and one of those slick little five-dollar sailors, and every cent paid out of my salary. I could step into that outfit to-morrow, look the part, and land back that job or any other. I had a way with the trade, even back at Finley's."

"Here, hold my jewel-bag, honey; I'm going to die of cold-cream suffocation if she don't soon come back and unsmear me."

"Opal beetle in it?"

"Yes, dearie; but it won't bite. It's muzzled with my diamond horseshoe."

"Nothing doing, Kit. Put it under your pillow."

"You better watch out. There's a thirteenth letter in the alphabet; you might accidentally use it some day. You're going to have a sweet time to-night, you are!"

"Why?"

"The boys have engaged De Butera to come up to the rooms."

"You mean the fortune-teller over at the Stag Hotel?"

"She's not a fortune-teller, you poor nervous wreck. She's the highest-priced spiritualist in the world. Moving tables—spooks—woof!"

"Faugh!" said Hester, rising from her couch and feeling about with her little bare feet for the daintiest of pink-silk mules. "I could make tables move too, at forty dollars an hour. Where's my attendant? I want an alcohol rub."

They did hold séance that night in a fine spirit of lark, huddled together in the *de-luxe* sitting-room of one of their suites, and little half-hysterical shrieks and much promiscuous ribaldry under cover of darkness.

Madame De Butera was of a distinctly fat and earthy blondness, with a coarse-lace waist over pink, and short hands covered with turquoise rings of many shapes and blues.

Tables moved. A dead sister of Wheeler's spoke in thin, high voice. Why is it the dead are always so vocally thin and high?

A chair tilted itself on hind legs, eliciting squeals from the women. Babe spoke with a gentleman friend long

since passed on, and Kitty with a deceased husband, and began to cry quite sobbily and took little sips of high-ball quite gulpily. May Denison, who was openly defiant, allowed herself to be hypnotized and lay rigid between two chairs, and Kitty went off into rampant hysteria until Wheeler finally placed a hundred-dollar bill over the closed eyes, and whether under it, or to the legerdemain of madam's manipulating hands, the tight eyes opened, May, amid riots of laughter claiming for herself the hundred-dollar bill, and Kitty, quite resuscitated, jumping up for a table cancan, her yellow hair tumbling, and her China-blue eyes with the dregs in them inclined to water.

All but Hester. She sat off by herself in a peacock-colored gown that wrapped her body-suavity as if the fabric were soaking wet, a band of smoky blue about her forehead. Never intoxicated, a slight amount of alcohol had a tendency to make her morose.

"What's the matter, Cleo?" asked Wheeler, sitting down beside her and lifting her cool fingers one by one, and, by reason of some remote analogy that must have stirred within him, seeing in her a Nile queen. "What's the matter, Cleo; does the spook-stuff get your goat?"

She turned on him eyes that were all troubled up like waters suddenly wind-blown.

"God!" she said, her fingers, nails inward, closing about his arm. "Wheeler—can—can the—dead—speak?"

But fleeting as the hours themselves were the moods of them all, and the following morning there they were, the eight of them, light with laughter and caparisoned again as to hampers, veils, coats, dogs, off for a day's motoring through the springtime countryside.

"Where to?" shouted Wheeler, twisting from where he and Hester sat in the first of the cars to call to the two motor-loads behind.

"I thought Crystal Cave was the spot"—from May Denison in the last of the cars, winding her head in a scarlet veil.

"Crystal Springs it is, then."

"Is that through Demopolis?"

Followed a scanning of maps.

"Sure! Here it is! See! Granite City. Mitchell. Demopolis. Crystal Cave."

"Good Lord, Hester, you're not going to spend any time in that dump?"

"It's my home town," she replied coldly. "The only relation I had is buried there. It's nothing out of your way to drop me on the court-house steps and pick me up as you drive back. I've been wanting to get there ever since we're down here. Wanting to stop by your home town you haven't seen in five years isn't unreasonable, is it?"

He admitted it wasn't, leaning to kiss her.

She turned to him a face, soft, with one of the pouts he usually found irresistible.

"Honey," she said, "what do you think?"

"What?"

"Chris is buying May that chinchilla coat I showed you in Meyerbloom's window the day before we left."

"The deuce he is!" he said, letting go of her hand but hers immediately covering his.

"She's wiring her sister in the 'Girlie Revue' to go in and buy it for her."

"Outrage—fifteen thousand dollars to cover a woman's back! Look at the beautiful scenery, honey! You're always prating about views. Look at those hills over there! Great—isn't it?"

"I wouldn't expect it, Wheeler, if it wasn't war-year and you landing one big contract after another. I'd hate to see May show herself in that chinchilla coat when we could beat her to it by a wire. I could telegraph Meyerbloom himself. I bought the sable rug of him. I'd hate it, Wheeler, to see her and Chris beat us to it. So would you. What's fifteen thousand when one of your contracts alone runs into the hundred thousands? Honey?"

"Wire," he said sourly, but not withdrawing his hand from hers.

They left her at the shady court-house steps in Demopolis, but with pleasantry and gibe.

"Give my love to the town pump."

"Rush the old oaken growler for me."

"So long!" she called, eager to be rid of them. "Pick me up at six sharp."

She walked slowly up High Street. Passers-by turned to stare, but otherwise she was unrecognized. There was a new Five-and-Ten-Cent Store, and Finley Brothers had added an ell. High Street was paved. She made a foray down into the little side street where she had spent those queerly remote first seventeen years of her life. How dim her aunt seemed! The little unpainted frame house was gone. There was a lumber-yard on the site. Everything seemed to have shrunk. The street was narrower and dirtier than she recalled it.

She made one stop, at the house of Maggie Simms, a high-school chum. It was a frame house, too, and she remembered that the front door opened directly into the parlor and the side entrance was popularly used in lieu. But a strange sister-in-law opened the side door. Maggie was married and living in Cincinnati. Oh, fine—a master mechanic, and there were twins. She started back toward Finley's, thinking of Gerald, and half-way she changed her mind.

Maggie Simms married and living in Cincinnati. Twins! Heigh-ho—what a world! The visit was hardly a success. At half after five, she was on her way back to the court-house steps. Stupid to have made it six!

And then, of course, and quite as you would have it, Gerald Fishback came along. She recognized his blondness long before he saw her. He was bigger and more tanned, and, as of old, carried his hat in his hand. She noticed that there were no creases down the front of his trousers, but the tweed was good and he gave off that intangible aroma of well-being.

She was surprised at the old thrill racing over her. Seeing him was like an exquisite stab of quick steel through the very pit of her being. She reached out, touching him, before he saw her.

"Gerald," she said, soft and teasingly.

It was actually as if he had been waiting for that touch, because, before he could possibly have perceived her, her name was on his lips.

"Hester!" he said, the blueness of his eyes flashing between blinks. "Not Hester?"

"Yes; Hester," she said, smiling up at him.

He grasped both her hands, stammering for words that wanted to come quicker than he could articulate.

"Hester!" he kept repeating. "Hester!"

"To think you knew me, Gerald!"

"Know you! I'd know you blind-folded. And how—I—you're beautiful, Hester! I think you've grown five years younger."

"You've got on, Gerald. You look it."

"Yes; I'm general manager now at Finley's."

"I'm so glad. Married?"

"Not while there's a Hester Bevins on earth."

She started at her own name.

"How do you know I'm not?"

"I—I know—" he said, reddening up.

"Isn't there some place we can talk, Gerald? I've thirty minutes before my friends call for me."

"Thirty minutes?"

"Your rooms? Haven't you rooms or a room where we could go and sit down?"

"Why—why, no, Hester," he said, still red. "I'd rather you didn't go there. But here. Let's stop in at the St. James Hotel. There's a parlor."

To her surprise, she felt herself color up and was pleasantly conscious of her finger-tips.

"You darling!" She smiled up at him.

They were seated presently in the unaired plush-and-cherry, Nottingham-and-Axminster parlor of a small-town hotel.

"Hester!" he kept repeating. "Hester!"

"I'm a bad durl," she said, challenging his eyes for what he knew.

"You're a little saint walked down and leaving an empty pedestal in my dreams."

She placed his forefinger over his mouth.

"Sh-h," she said. "I'm not a saint, Gerald; you know that."

"Yes," he said, with a great deal of boyishness in his defiance; "I do know it, Hester, but it is those who have been through the fire who come out—new. It was your early environment."

"My aunt died on the town, Gerald, I heard. I could have saved her all that if I had only known. She was cheap, aunt was. Poor soul! She never looked ahead."

"It was your early environment, Hester. I've explained that often enough to them here. I'd bank on you, Hester—swear by you."

She patted him.

"I'm a pretty bad egg, Gerald. According to the standards of a town like this, I'm rotten, and they're about right. For five years, Gerald, I've—"

"The real *you* is ahead of, and not behind you, Hester."

"How wonderful," she said, "for you to feel that way, but—"

"Hester," he said, more and more the big boy, his knees touching the floor now, and his big blond head nearing hers, "I don't care about anything that's past; I only know that, for me, you are the—"

"Gerald," she said, "for God's sake!"

"I'm a two-hundred-a-month man now, Hester; I want to build you the prettiest, the whitest little house in this town. Out in the Brierwood section. I'll make them kowtow to you, Hester; I—"

"Why," she said slowly, and looking at him with a certain sadness, "you couldn't keep me in stockings, Gerald. The gora on this hat cost more than one month of your salary."

"Good God!" he said.

"You're a dear, sweet boy just the same; but you remember what I told you about my *crêpe-de-Chine* soul."

"Just the same, I love you best in those crispy white shirt-waists you used to wear and the little blue suits and sailor-hats. You remember that day at Finley's picnic, Hester, that day, dear, that you—you—"

"You dear boy!"

"But it—your mistake—it—it's all over. You work now, don't you, Hester?"

Somehow, looking into the blueness of his eyes and their entreaty for her affirmative, she did what you or I might have done. She half lied, regretting it while the words still smoked on her lips.

"Why, yes, Gerald, I've held a fine position in Lichtig Brothers, New York importers. Those places sometimes pay as high as seventy-five a week. But I don't make any bones, Gerald; I've not been an angel."

"The—the Jew, Hester?"—his lips quivering with a nausea for the question.

"I haven't seen him in four years," she answered truthfully.

He laid his cheek on her hand.

"I knew you'd come through. It was your environment. I'll marry you to-morrow—to-day, Hester; I love you."

"You darling boy!" she said, her lips back tight against her teeth. "You darling, darling boy!"

"Please, Hester—we'll forget what has been."

"Let me go," she said, rising and pinning on her hat; "let me go—or—or I'll cry, and—and I don't want to cry."

"Hester," he called, rushing after her and wanting to fold her back into his arms, "let me prove my trust—my love—"

"Don't! Let me go! Let me go!"

At slightly after six, the ultra cavalcade drew up at the court-house steps. She was greeted with the pleasantries and the gibes.

"Have a good time, sweetness?" asked Wheeler, arranging her rugs.

"Yes," she said, lying back and letting her lids droop; "but tired—very, very tired."

At the hotel, she stopped a moment to write a telegram before going up for the vapor-bath, nap, and massage that were to precede dinner.

"Meyerbloom & Company, Furriers. Fifth Avenue, New York," it was addressed.

This is not a war-story except as it has to do with profiteering, parlor-patriots, and the return of Gerald Fishback.

While Hester was living this tale, and the chinchilla coat was enveloping her like an ineffably tender caress, three hundred thousand of her country's youths were at strangle-hold across three thousand miles of sea, and on a notorious night when Hester walked, fully dressed in a green gown of iridescent fish-scales, into the electric fountain of a seaside cabaret, and Wheeler had to carry her to her car wrapped in a sable rug, Gerald Fishback was lying with his face in Flanders mud, and his eye-sockets blackly deep and full of shrapnel, and a lung-eating gas-cloud rolling at him across the vast bombarded dawn.

Hester read of him one morning, sitting up in bed against a mound of lace-over-pink pillows, a masseur at the pink soles of her feet. It was as if his name catapulted at her from a column she never troubled to read. She remained quite still, looking at the name for a full five minutes after it had pierced her full consciousness. Then, suddenly, she swung out of bed, tilting over the masseur.

"Tessie," she said, evenly enough, "that will do. I have to hurry to Long Island to a base hospital. Go to that little telephone in the hall—will you?—and call my car."

But the visit was not so easy of execution. It required two days of red tape and official dispensation before she finally reached the seaside hospital that, by unpleasant coincidence, only a year before had been the resort hotel of more than one dancing-orgy.

She thought she would faint when she saw him, jerking herself back with a straining of all her faculties. The blood seemed to drain away from her body, leaving her ready to sink, and only the watchful and threatening eye of a man nurse sustained her. He was sitting up in bed, and she would never have recognized in him anything of Gerald except for the shining Scandinavian quality of

his hair. His eyes were not bandaged, but their sockets were dry and bare like the beds of old lakes long since drained. She had only seen the like in eyeless marble busts. There were unsuspected cheek-bones, pitched now very high in his face, and his neck, rising above the army nightshirt, seemed cruelly long, possibly from thinness.

"Are you Hester?" whispered the man nurse.

She nodded, her tonsils squeezed together in an absolute knot.

"He called for you all through his delirium," he said, and went out. She stood at the bedside, trying to keep down the screams from her speech when it should come. But he was too quick for her.

"Hester," he said, feeling out.

And in their embrace, her agony melted to tears that choked and seared, beat and scalded her, and all the time it was he who held her with rigid arm, whispered to her, soothed down the sobs which tore through her like the rip of silk, seeming to split her being.

"Now—now. Why, Hester! Now—now—now. Sh—
—it will be over in a minute. You mustn't feel badly. Come now; is this the way to greet a fellow that's so darn glad to see you that nothing matters? Sure I can see you, Hester. Plain as day in your little crispy waist. Now, now; you'll get used to it in a minute. Now—now—"

"I can't stand it, Gerald; I can't! Can't! Kill me, Gerald, but don't ask me to stand it!"

He stroked down the side of her, lingering at her cheek.

"Sh-h. Take your time, dear," he said, with the first furry note in his voice. "I know it's hard, but take your time. You'll get used to me. It's the shock, that's all. Sh-h."

She covered his neck with kisses and scalding tears, her compassion for him racing through her in chills.

"I could tear out my eyes, Gerald, and give them to you. I could tear out my heart and give it to you. I'm bursting of pain. Gerald! Gerald!"

There was no sense of proportion left her. She could think only of what her own physical suffering might

do in penance. She would willingly have opened the arteries of her heart and bled for him on the moment. Her compassion wanted to scream. She, who had never sacrificed anything, wanted suddenly to bleed at his feet, and prayed to do so on the agonized crest of the moment.

"There's a girl! Why, I'm going to get well, Hester, and do what thousands of others of the blinded are doing. Build up a new, a useful, and a busy life."

"It's not fair! It's not fair!"

"I'm ready now, except for this old left lung. It's burned a bit, you see. Gas."

"God! God!"

"It's pretty bad, I admit. But there's another way of looking at it. There's a glory in being chosen to bear your country's wounds."

"Your beautiful eyes! Your blue, beautiful eyes! O God, what does it all mean? Living! Dying! All the rotters, all the rat-eyed ones I know, scot-free and Gerald chosen. God, God, where are you?"

"He was never so close to me as now, Hester. And with you here, dear, he is closer than ever."

"I'll never leave you, Gerald," she said, crying down into his sleeve again. "Don't be afraid of the dark, dear! I'll never leave you."

"Nonsense," he said, smoothing her hair that the hat had fallen away from.

"Never! Never! I wish I were a mat for you to walk on. I want to crawl on my hands and knees for you. I'll never leave you, Gerald—never!"

"My beautiful Hester!" he said unsteadily, and then again, "Nonsense."

But, almost on the moment, the man nurse returned, and she was obliged to leave him, but not without throbbing promises of the morrow's return, and then there took place, down-stairs in an ante-room, a long, a closeted, and very private interview with a surgeon and more red tape and filing of applications. She was so weak from crying that a nurse was called finally to help her through the corridors to her car.

Gerald's left lung was burnt out, and he had three, possibly four, weeks to live.

All the way home, in her tan limousine with the little yellow curtains, she sat quite upright, away from the upholstery, crying down her uncovered face, but a sudden, an exultant determination hardening in her mind.

That night, a strange conversation took place in the Riverside Drive apartment. She sat on Wheeler's left knee, toying with his platinum chain, a strained, a rather terrible pallor out in her face, but the sobs well under her voice, and its modulation about normal. She had been talking for over two hours, silencing his every interruption until he had fallen quite still.

"And—and that's all, Wheeler," she ended up. "I've told you everything. We were never more than just—friends—Gerald and me. You must take my word for it, because I swear it before God."

"I take your word, Hester," he said huskily.

"And there he lies, Wheeler, without—without any eyes in his head. Just as if they'd been burnt out by irons. And he—he smiles when he talks. That's the awful part. Smiles like—well, I guess like the angel he—he almost is. You see, he says it's a glory to carry the wounds of his country. Just think, just think—that boy to feel that, the way he lies there!"

"Poor boy! Poor, poor boy!"

"Gerald's like that. So—so full of faith. And, Wheeler, he thinks he's going to get well and lead a useful life like they teach the blind to do. He reminds me of one of those Greek statues down at the Athens Café. You know—broken. That's it; he's a broken statue."

"Poor fellow! Poor fellow! Do something for him. Buy the finest fruit in the town for him. Send a case of wine. Two."

"I—I think I must be torn to pieces inside, Wheeler, the way I've cried."

"Poor little girl!"

"Wheeler?"

"Now, now," he said; "taking it so to heart won't do no good. It's rotten, I know, but worrying won't help.

Got me right upset, too. Come; get it off your mind. Let's take a ride. Doll up; you look a bit peaked. Come now, and to-morrow we'll buy out the town for him."

"Wheeler?" she said. "Wheeler?"

"What?"

"Don't look, Wheeler; I've got something else to ask you—something queer."

"Now, now," he said, his voice hardening but trying to maintain a chiding note; "you know what you promised after the chinchilla—no more this year until—"

"No, no; for God's sake, not that! It's still about Gerald."

"Well?"

"Wheeler, he's only got four weeks to live. Five at the outside."

"Now, now, girl; we've been all over that."

"He loves me, Wheeler, Gerald does."

"Yes?"—dryly.

"It would be like doing something decent—the only decent thing I've done in all my life, Wheeler, almost like doing something for the war, the way these women in the pretty white caps have done, and you know we—we haven't turned a finger for it except to—to gain—if I was to—to marry Gerald for those few weeks, Wheeler. I know it's a—rotten sacrifice, but I guess that's the only kind I'm capable of making."

He sat squat, with his knees spread.

"You crazy?" he said.

"It would mean, Wheeler, his dying happy. He doesn't know it's all up with him. He'd be made happy for the poor little rest of his life. He loves me. You see, Wheeler, I was his first—his only sweetheart. I'm on a pedestal, he says, in his dreams. I never told you—but that boy was willing to marry me, Wheeler, knowing—some—of the things I am. He's always carried round a dream of me, you see—no; you wouldn't see, but I've been—well, I guess sort of a medallion that won't tarnish in his heart— Wheeler, for the boy's few weeks he has left? Wheeler?"

"Well, I'll be hanged!"

"I'm not turning holy, Wheeler. I am what I am. But that boy lying out there—I can't bear it! It wouldn't make any difference with us—afterward. You know where you stand with me and for always, but it would mean the dying happy of a boy who fought for us. Let me marry that boy, Wheeler. Let his light go out in happiness. Wheeler? Please, Wheeler?" He would not meet her eyes. "Wheeler?"

"Go to it, Hester," he said, coughing about in his throat and rising to walk away. "Bring him here and give him the fat of the land. You can count on me to keep out of the way. Go to it," he repeated.

And so they were married. Hester holding his hand beside the hospital cot, the man nurse and doctor standing by, and the chaplain incanting the immemorial words. A bar of sunshine lay across the bed, and Gerald pronounced each "I will" in a lifted voice that carried to the four corners of the little room. She was allowed to stay that night past hospital-hours, and they talked with the dusk flowing over them.

"Hester, Hester," he said, "I should have had the strength to hold out against your making this terrible sacrifice."

"It's the happiest hour of my life," she said, kissing him.

"I feel well enough to get up now, sweetheart."

"Gerald, don't force. You've weeks ahead before you are ready for that."

"But to-morrow, dear, home! In whose car are you calling for me to-morrow to take me *home*?"

"In a friend's, dearest."

"Won't I be crowding up our little apartment? Describe it again to me, dearest—our *home*."

"It's so little, Gerald. Three rooms and the littlest babyest kitchen. When you're once up, I'll teach its every corner to you."

Tears seeped through the line where his lids had been, and it was almost more than she could bear.

"I'll make it up to you though, Hester. I know I

should have been strong enough to hold out against your marrying me, but I'll make it up. I've a great scheme; a sort of braille system of accountancy—"

"Please, Gerald—not now!"

"If only, Hester, I felt easier about the finances. Will your savings stand the strain? Your staying at home from your work this way—and then me—"

"Gerald dear, I've told you so often—I've saved more than we need."

"My girl!"

"My dear, my dear!" she said.

They moved him with hardly a jar in an army ambulance, and with the yellow limousine riding alongside to be of possible aid, and she had the bed stripped of its laces and cool with linen for him, and he sighed out when they placed him on it and would not let go her hand.

"What a feeling of space for so little a room!"

"It's the open windows, love."

He lay back tiredly.

"What sweet linen!"

"I shopped it for you."

"You, too—you're in linen, Hester?"

"A percale shirt-waist. I shopped it for you, too."

"Give me your hand," he said, and pressed a string of close kisses into its palm.

The simplicity of the outrageous subterfuge amazed even her. She held hot-house grapes at two dollars a pound to his lips, and he ate them through a smile.

"Naughty, extravagant girl!" he said.

"I saw them on a fruit-stand for thirty cents, and couldn't resist."

"Never mind; I'll make it up to you."

Later, he asked for braille books, turning his sightless face toward her as he studied, trying to concentrate through the pain in his lung.

"If only you wouldn't insist upon the books awhile yet, dear. The doctor says it's too soon."

"I feel so strong, Hester, with you near, and, besides, I must start the pot boiling."

She kissed down into the high nap of his hair, softly. Evenings, she read to him newspaper accounts of his fellow soldiers, and the day of the peace, for which he had paid so terribly, she rolled his bed, alone, with a great tugging and straining, to the open window, where the wind from the river could blow in against him and steamboat whistles shoot up like rockets.

She was so inexpressibly glad for the peace-day. Somehow, it seemed easier and less blackly futile to give him up.

Of Wheeler, for three running weeks she had not a glimpse, and then, one day, he sent up a hamper, not a box but an actual trunk of roses, and she, in turn, sent them up the back way to Kitty's flat, not wanting even their fragrance released.

With Kitty, there were little hurried confabs each day outside the apartment door in the hallway before the elevator-shaft. A veil of awe seemed to wrap the Drew woman.

"I can't get it out of my head, Hester. It's like a fairy-story, and, in another way, it's a scream—Wheeler standing for this."

"Sh-h, Kitty. His ears are so sensitive."

"Quit shushing me every time I open my mouth. Poor kid! Let me have a look at him. He wouldn't know."

"No! No!"

"God, if it wasn't so sad, it would be a scream—Wheeler footing the bills!"

"Oh—you! Oh—oh—you!"

"All right, all right; don't take the measles over it. I'm going. Here's some chicken broth I brought down. Ed sent it up to me from Sherry's."

But Hester poured it into the sink for some nameless reason, and brewed some fresh from a fowl she tipped the hall-boy a dollar to go out and purchase.

She slept on a cot at the foot of his bed, so sensitive to his waking that almost before he came up to consciousness, she was at his side. All day she wore the little white shirt-waists, a starched one fresh each morning, and at night scratchy little unlacy nightgowns with

long sleeves and high yokes. He liked to run his hand along the crispness of the fabric.

"I love you in cool stuff, Hester. You're so cool yourself, I always think of you in the little white waist and blue skirt. You remember, dear—Finley's annual?"

"I—I'm going to dress like that for you always, Gerald."

"I won't let you be going back to work for long, sweetheart. I've some plans up my sleeve, I have."

"Yes! Yes!"

But when the end did come, it was with as much of a shock as if she had not been for days expecting it. The doctor had just left, puncturing his arm and squirting into his poor tired system a panacea for the pain. But he would not react to it, fighting down the drowsiness.

"Hester," he said suddenly, and a little weakly, "lean down, sweetheart, and kiss me—long—long—"

She did, and it was with the pressure of her lips to his that he died.

It was about a week after the funeral that Wheeler came back. She was on the *chaise longue* that had been dragged out into the parlor, in the webbiest of white negligées, a little large-eyed, a little subdued, but sweetening the smile she turned toward him by a trick she had of lifting the brows.

"Hel-lo Wheeler!" she said, raising her cheek to be kissed.

He trailed his lips, but did not seek her mouth, sitting down rather awkwardly and in the spread-knee'd fashion he had.

"Well, girl—you all right?"

"You helped," she said.

"It gave me a jolt, too. I made over twenty-five thousand to the Red Cross on the strength of it."

"Thank you, Wheeler."

"Lord!" he said, rising and rubbing his hands together. "Give us a couple of fingers to drink, honey; I'm cotton-mouthed."

She reached languidly for a blue-enameled bell, lying

back, with her arms dangling and her smile out. Then, as if realizing that the occasion must be lifted, turned her face to him.

"Old bummer!" she said, using one of her terms of endearment for him and two-thirds closing her eyes. Then did he stoop and kiss her roundly on the lips.

For the remainder of this tale, I could wish for a pen supernally dipped, or for a metaphysician's plating to my vernacular, or for the linguistic patois of that land off somewhere to the west of Life. Or maybe, just a neurologist's chart of Hester's nerve-history would help.

In any event, after an evening of musical comedy and of gelatinous dancing, Hester awoke at four o'clock the next morning out of an hour of sound sleep, leaping to her knees there in bed like a quick flame, her gesture shooting straight up toward the jointure of wall and ceiling.

"Gerald!" she called, her smoky black hair floating around her and her arms cutting through the room's blackness, "Gerald!" Suddenly the room was not black. It was light with the Scandinavian blondness of Gerald, the head of him nebulous there above the pink-satin canopy of her dressing-table and, more than that, the drained lakes of his sockets were deep with eyes. Yes; in all their amazing blueness, but queerly sharpened to steel points that went through Hester and through her as if bayonets were pushing into her breasts and her breathing.

"Gerald!" she shrieked, in one more cry that curdled the quiet, and sat up in bed, trembling and hugging herself, and breathing in until her lips were drawn shudderingly against her teeth like wind-sucked window-shades.

"Gerald!" And then the picture did a sort of moving-picture fade-out, and black Lottie came running with her hair grotesquely greased and flattened to take out the kink, and gave her a drink of water with the addition of two drops from a bottle, and turned on the night-light and went back to bed.

The next morning, Hester carried about what she called

"a head," and, since it was Wheeler's day at Rosencranz, remained in bed until three o'clock, Kitty curled at the foot of it the greater part of the forenoon.

"It was the rotten night did me up. Dreams— Ugh—dreams!"

"No wonder," diagnosed Kitty sweetly. "Indigestion from having your cake and eating it."

At three, she dressed and called for her car, driving down to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, a gothic Thanatopsis, set, with one of those laughs up her sleeves New York so loves to indulge in, right in the heart of the city, between an automobile-accessory shop and a quick-lunch room. Gerald had been buried from there with simple-flag-draped service in the Gothic chapel that was protected from the view and roar of the elevated trains by suitably stained windows. There was a check in Hester's purse made out for an amount that corresponded to the statement she had received from the Ivy Funeral Rooms. And right here again, for the sake of your elucidation, I could wish at least for the neurologist's chart. At the very door to the establishment—with one foot across the threshold, in fact—she paused, her face tilted toward the corner where wall and ceiling met, and at whatever she saw there, her eyes dilating widely, and her left hand springing to her bosom as if against the incision of quick steel. Then, without even entering, she rushed back to her car again, urging her chauffeur, at the risk of every speed-regulation, homeward.

That was the beginning of purgatorial weeks that were soon to tell on Hester. They actually brought out a streak of gray through her hair, which Lottie promptly dyed and worked under into the lower part of her coiffure. For herself, Hester would have let it remain.

Wheeler was frankly perplexed. God knows it was bad enough to be called upon to endure streaks of unreasonableness at Rosencranz, but Hester wasn't there to show that side to him if she had it. To be pretty frank about it, she was well paid not to. Well paid! He'd done his part. More than nine out of ten would have done. Been made a jay of, if the truth was known.

She was a Christmas-tree bauble, and was expected to throw off holiday iridescence. There were limits!

"You're off your feed, girl. Go off by yourself and speed up."

"It's the nights, Gerald. Good God—I mean Wheeler! They kill me. I can't sleep. Can't you get a doctor who will give me stronger drops? He doesn't know my case. Nerves, he calls it. It's the head. If only I could get rid of this head!"

"You women and your nerves and your heads! Are you all alike? Get out and get some exercise. Keep down your gasoline bills and it will send your spirits up. There's such a thing as having it too good."

She tried to meet him in lighter vein after that, dressing her most bizarrely, and greeting him one night in a batik gown, a new process of dyeing that could be flamboyant and narrative in design. This one, a long, sinuous robe that enveloped her slimness like a flame, beginning down around the train in a sullen smoke and rushing up to her face in a burst of crimson.

He thought her so exquisitely rare that he was not above the poor, soggy device of drinking his dinner-wine from the cup of her small crimson slipper, and she dangled on his knee like the dangerous little flame she none too subtly purported to be, and he spanked her quickly and softly across the wrists because she was too nervous to hold the match steadily enough for his cigar to take light, and then kissed away all the mock sting.

But the next morning, at the fateful hour four o'clock, and in spite of four sleeping-drops, Lottie on the cot at the foot of her bed and the night-light burning, she awoke on the crest of such a shriek that a stiletto might have slit the silence, the end of the sheet crammed up and into her mouth, and, ignoring all of Lottie's calming, sat up on her knees, her streaming eyes on the jointure of wall and ceiling, where the open accusing ones of Gerald looked down at her. It was not that they were terrible eyes. They were full of the sweet blue, and clear as lakes. It was only that they knew. Those eyes *knew*. *They knew!* She tried the device there at four o'clock

in the morning of tearing up the still unpaid check to the Ivy Funeral Rooms, and then she curled up in bed with her hand in the negro maid's, and her face half buried in the pillow.

"Help me, Lottie," she begged; "help me!"

"Law, pore child! Gettin' the horrors every night this away! I've been through it before with other ladies. But I never saw a case of the sober horrors befoh. Looks like they's the worst of all. Go to sleep, child. I'se holdin'."

You see, Lottie had looked in on life where you and I might not. A bird's-eye view may be very, very comprehensive, but a domestic-eye view can sometimes be very, very close.

And then, one night, after Hester had beat her hands down into the mattress and implored Gerald to close his accusing eyes and she had screamed and sobbed up against the jointure, she sat up in bed, waiting for the first streak of dawn to show itself, railing at the pain in her head.

"God, my head! Rub it, Lottie. My head! My eyes! The back of my neck!"

The next morning, she did what you probably have been expecting she would do. She up and dressed, sending Lottie to bed for a needed rest. Dressed herself in the little old blue-serge suit that had been hanging in the very back of a closet for four years, with a five- and two ten-dollar bills pinned into its pocket, and pressed the little five-dollar sailor down on the smooth winglike quality of her hair. She looked smaller, peculiarly indescribably younger. She wrote Wheeler a note, dropping it down the mail chute in the hall, and then came back, looking about rather aimlessly for something she might want to pack. There was nothing; so she went out quite bare and simply, with all her lovely jewels in the leather case on the upper shelf of the bedroom closet, as she had explained to Wheeler in the note.

That afternoon, she presented herself to Lichtig. He was again as you would expect—round-bellied, and wore his cigar up obliquely from one corner of his mouth. He

engaged her immediately at an increase of five dollars a week, and as she was leaving with the promise to report at eight-thirty the next morning, he pinched her cheek, she pulling away angrily.

"None of that!"

"My mistake," he apologized.

She considered it promiscuous and cheap, and you know her aversion for cheapness.

Then she obtained, after a few forays in and out of brownstone houses in West Forty-fifth Street, one of those hall bed-rooms so familiar to human-interest stories—the iron-bed, wash-stand, and slop-jar kind. There was a five-dollar advance required. That left her twenty dollars.

She shopped a bit then in an Eighth Avenue department store, and, with the day well on the wane, took a street-car up to the Ivy Funeral Rooms. This time, she entered, but the proprietor did not recognize her until she explained. As you know, she looked smaller and younger, and there was no tan car at the curb.

"I want to pay this off by the week," she said, handing him out the statement and a much folded ten-dollar bill. He looked at her, surprised. "Yes," she said, her teeth biting off the word in a click.

"Certainly," he replied, handing her out a receipt for the ten.

"I will pay five dollars a week hereafter."

"That will stretch it out to twenty-eight weeks," he said, still doubtfully.

"I can't help it; I must."

"Certainly," he said, "that will be all right," but looking puzzled.

That night, she slept in the hall bedroom in the Eighth Avenue, machine-stitched nightgown. She dropped off about midnight, praying not to awaken at four. But she did—with a slight start, sitting up in bed, her eyes on the jointure.

Gerald's face was there, and his blue eyes were open, but the steel points were gone. They were smiling eyes. They seemed to embrace her, to wash her in their fluid.

All her fear and the pain in her head were gone. She sat up, looking at him, the tears streaming down over her smile and her lips moving.

Then, sighing out like a child, she lay back on the pillow, turned over, and went to sleep.

And this is the story of Hester which so insisted to be told. I think she must have wanted you to know. And wanted Gerald to know that you know, and, in the end, I rather think she wanted God to know.

Everybody's Magazine

“CAB, SIR?”

BY

SAMUEL HOPKINS ADAMS

"CAB, SIR?"¹

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REVIEWING the facts candidly, the sike now attributes his part in the crime to the stimulus of a third cup of tea. The first two he took because he was lonely. The third he had, for fellowship, on invitation from a gob and a flit who perceived his condition. They explained that they were lifelong friends, having originally met last week at a sing-song while waiting for their final discharge papers; and why not see New York first?

The sike said that he had no place to go short of College City, Missouri. The gob, it appeared, had plenty of places to go in the near vicinage, but did not wish to resume his old way of life which, he hinted, was ignominious if not actually criminal. The flit had to go to the dental clinic in the morning, so he didn't care; he was feeling reckless and suicidal. The hour was that of slack-tide on Broadway, when the chorus is just opening the second act.

"What is that which it is that we make to do this evening?" inquired the gob, as they emerged from the War Camp Community Service Club on Twenty-seventh Street.

Having taken the cantonment course in Uncle Sam's French Idioms for the Idiotic, the others comprehended at once.

"Would a bus ride be a good start?" suggested the sike.

"Take a walk and get the kinks out of us," amended the flit who still suffered from transport cramp.

"What-ho about a roof-show?" queried the gob.

Madison Square Garden loomed flatly beside them

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while they were still debating it by the ambulant method. A shaft of light from a side exit fell across their path. The flit blinked into the aperture and withdrew his tongue from his most peevish tooth for the purpose of remarking: "Whoa, Dobbins!"

"It's a tank," observed the sike, following his gaze. "What does the sign say?" He pointed to a placard, pendent from the creature's neck.

"To be returned," read the gob.

"To return it, you first got to take it out," argued the flit. "It spoke just in time. Maudie, I'm your little return ticket."

"You!" said the gob incredulously. "Where do you come in? Can you run that thing?"

"I can run anything that drinks gasoline."

"It looks like Providence by special arrangement," observed the gob. "What do you say, Buddy?"

"I told you I was for a bus ride," returned the sike under the influence of the third cup of tea.

"D'you reckon this reptile's got a keeper?" asked the flit. He entered the passageway and looked about, but found no one. "Or a mouth?" he proceeded. "We've got to persuade it to swallow us. Hey, gob; you're tender and juicy. Tackle its whiskers."

"Those aren't whiskers. Those are machine guns. Hi! Eureka! Here's the door with 'welcome' on the mat." At his touch a panel at the front slowly unfolded outward, displaying a lighted interior.

"Who'll join me in the Jonah Club?" invited the flit, plunging down the wide gullet. "It's my idea we'd better get moving before our little whale gets to whinnying and raises its master. All aboard that's going aboard. Public Library, Eagle Hotel, Soldier's Monument and way stations to the Guard-House!"

The others clambered into the monster's interior. Its mouth closed after them.

"Now, I hope the dum thing responds to gentle treatment," the flit said. "I see how she starts, but I gotta take a chance on how she steers. Are you ready? Grab and stick; she may buck. Go!"

He did something intricate and skilled to some levers. With a noise as of a boiler-shop attacked by convulsions, the tank moved majestically forth and, after a moment of doubt, which nearly cost a taxi its life, turned to the left and the bright lights. The voyage had begun.

Here, for the benefit of those who have been living, since the war began, a retired life in Tierra del Fuego or Spitzbergen, it may be well to explain the terms of the fellowship. A sike is a private of the Psychological Division of the Army Medical Corps. Morale is his special concern; he is the man who keeps things stirring in camp when it has rained for three solid weeks and the mail has gone wrong and war is all that Sherman said of it and more. He is usually a college professor who has seen a great light. This one was, and had. His name is Follansbee James. A flit is a flying and prying person who snoops about in an airplane of low elevation and manners, poking his nose into matters which it is undesirable that he should know. Such is the shamelessness of our Government that our flit, Frederick Slayter by name, had actually been decorated for his ill-bred performances. A gob is, of course—though nobody knows why—an able seaman. Mr. "Chaw" Veeder was unusually able. He had other names, but they had vanished owing to his propensity for conserving a plug of tobacco unobtrusively in his cheek. There is a deal of hidden vice in our Navy. Having thus satisfied, I trust, inquiring minds of a scientific and philological bent, I will now return to the deliberate and uproarious conveyance wherein I have left the trio.

Bhoong - barrang - whroo - oo - oom - prrrrawng - bomp - clink - whang - oomble - gawmmle-*BOOM!* The tank proceeded westward on Twenty-seventh Street at a breakneck pace of three miles an hour. Windows flew up. Pajama-clad figures, and others more frilly, appeared therein, making somnolent and wrathful gestures. Scandalized inhabitants rushed out of doorways and rushed in again, for the tank was steering wildly. The gob funneled his hands toward the flit.

"Where you going?" he bellowed above the riot.

The answer came back faint and fragmentary, "Don't—how—'amthing—steers."

In a spirit of misplaced helpfulness, the gob seized a lever and pulled it. Straightway the tank paused, turned on its heel, executed a couple of airy pirouettes and with a metallic roar rushed up on the sidewalk and totally obliterated three garbage-cans which had been playing the extrahazardous rôle of innocent bystanders. It then cut obliquely across the corner, gently but firmly removed an electric-light pole which sought to stay its pace, debouched into Fifth Avenue, and pointing its nose up-town, resumed its sedate progress.

"Don't—excite—agin," bawled the flit at the wheel reprovingly to the gob. "Flighty—little—whiffet. Let-ter—own—way."

Ensnconced at a peep-hole the sike now delivered tidings in a strained yell, "Cavalry attack."

The flit threw off the power so suddenly that his two companions came and sat on his neck. Amidst the ensuing peace the night roar of Fifth Avenue was as the splash of ripples upon a gently sloping beach.

"Get off me!" protested the engineer. "I'm going to chin with the law."

He opened the door and a policeman's head appeared. At the same moment the sike retired and was dimly seen behind a stanchion busily writing what the gob surmised to be a long farewell to home and loved ones. The cop opened a mouth upon which lurked the suspicion of a grin.

"Where are you boys trundling your little alarm-clock on wheels?" he inquired.

"Back to quarters," replied the flit glibly.

The officer's glance fell upon the spread wings of the flit's service. "Looka-here," he observed. "You belong to the flying, don't you? You're in the wrong kind of bus."

"I'm goin' to fly this," asserted the operator blandly, "as soon as we come to a good take-off."

"Sure!" agreed the cop. "I'd like to go up with you. Just the same, I'll take a look at your papers. Hand 'em out."

The flit's hand started to his head to scratch for ideas, when it was arrested midway by another hand pressing into it a sheet of paper. A whisper from the sike did the rest. The document was duly presented to the representative of the civil law who read therein, under the insignium of the War Camp Community Service, which looks very official and authoritative, if not too closely scrutinized, that Corporal F. Slayter of the Aero Service, Able Seaman Veeder, and Private James of the Sanitary Corps, U. S. A., were specially detailed to operate Tractor Tank No. 13 in such highways of New York City as they might select for demonstration purposes.

"That gets by with me," announced the officer. "And I'll pass the word up the Avenue. But look out for the side-streets. Some of the cops on duty there are mean, suspicious guys that wouldn't be above spoiling a pleasant evening."

"Jesse James," observed the flit, turning admiringly to the sike, after the obstacle to progress had withdrawn, "as a psychologist you're a high-class forger. That touch about 'demonstration purposes'—that's bad, I guess! We could swim the tank in Central Park Reservoir or shin it up the Obelisk on the strength of that."

"And to think," sighed the sike, "that next week I'll be burbling about ethics in a stuffy classroom."

"Maybe not," returned the gob. "If Slayter does any more of his fancy evolutions, you may be in the hospital."

"Oh, I've got her now," asseverated the helmsman confidently, starting up the machinery. "—levers," he yelled, "control-caterpillars. Pull—right—and—" He did so, and the tank, executing a right about face, chased a horrified limousine half-way up a flight of brownstone steps. "Come back!" vociferated the exasperated flit, and hauled the left lever with such telling effect that (so the gob and the sike solemnly declare) the Waldorf-Astoria leaped a foot from its foundations and then escaped annihilation only by a fraction of an inch.

"For Mike's sake!" howled the gob. "Stick to the straight-and-narrow."

They lurched back into the main current, with a noise

as of cosmic dissolution, and the traffic broke and fled before their measured progress. As they went, there came from the rear of the interior a sound faint, far-away, and vague like the plaint of a discouraged cricket. It was the sike singing:

"We don't know where we're going
But we're on—our—way."

"That reminds me," said the flit, shutting off. "Where *are* we going?"

"Rubbernecking," suggested the gob.

"I've got an idea," offered the sike. "If the captain of this buoyant craft could steer around a corner—"

"I can steer around any number of corners," asserted the flit with a shade of offense in his tone.

"Simultaneously," added the gob.

"Looka-here, Chaw!" cried the operator hotly. "If you don't like the way I run this bus—"

"Calm yourself, corporal," adjured the sike, "and tell me, do you think you could negotiate the perilous straits that lead to the stage door of that sprightly ragtime operetta, taken from the French without opposition on their part and entitled 'Cherchez la Chicken'? I have important business there."

"Cutie in the chorus," surmised the flit, looking pained and moral. "Oh, Perfessor! I bid for an introduction. We're off!"

Cautiously manipulating the controls, the chauffeur contrived to achieve the turn into the side street with no incident or accident other than the conversion of a too torpid fruit-stand into a mixture of wood-pulp and citrus juices, the proprietor barely escaping with his life. The last act of "Cherchez la Chicken" had reached that point of delicate and original humor where the comedian, seated in a custard pie, sings a farewell to his mother-in-law while the chorus dances, when the side-alley which leads up to the stage burst into thunderous reverberations. There are numerous exits from the place—it is the one redeeming virtue of the show—and all of them promptly jammed. The comedian arose from the pie. The so-

prano fainted. The chorus dispersed. The management, wringing its already overringed hands, rushed out into the alley, now being patrolled by the tank, back and forth, amidst horrible echoes.

"Go away!" he shrieked. "What you want? Shut your noise."

The monster fell silent. From the orifice which should have been its mouth, the serious face of the sike emerged.

"Sir," said he, "last night I attended your performance."

"Who are you?" demanded the manager. "You spoil my show!"

"Four days' pay you mulcted me. And you seated me behind a pillar."

"Tell your troubles to the box-office," retorted the manager brutally. "I ain't inter—"

"I willingly concede," continued the sike calmly, "that the pillar was preferable, from any view-point, to the performance. But I want my four dollars back."

"A fat chance!" retorted the manager.

"Half speed ahead, if you please," requested the sike.

"Phsrang - bang - guzzoom - wurrong - kong-hong-whang!" clamored the monster, advancing upon the manager.

"Yi-yi-hi! Whoo-oo-ee-ee-ee!" sounded in piercing antiphony from within, where the soprano was having hysterics.

From the fourth rung of the fire-escape ladder the manager waved surrender with a roll of bills. "Black-mail!" he moaned as the sike selected a five and returned a dollar. "Please go away quietly."

The sike, turning, was intercepted by a small, fattish gentleman in evening clothes.

"On behalf of self and friend," said the man, "I thank you."

"You are attending the performance?" inquired the sike politely.

"I am. Less fortunate than yourself I did not draw a pillar. As for my friend, whom I was seeking to distract from a depression of the soul, he insulted me and

fled. He is now doubtless wandering about the city, a prey to unrelieved melancholy."

"What's biting your friend?" queried the flit, projecting an interested face into the dialogue.

The stranger accepted the interrogation in the spirit of metaphor in which it was offered. "Woman," he stated succinctly. "If you should happen to encounter six-foot two of correctly attired manhood baying the moon on a street corner, that is him. Or, if not him, he. Be kind to him, address him as Reuben Renssalaer Watts, and play him your little anvil chorus. It might cheer him up. I return to my martyrdom." He saluted and retired.

In deference to the manager's entreaty, the tank backed out discreetly, making hardly more commotion than the average railway collision, and retired along Forty-fourth Street toward the Avenue. It roused a corpulent and fluffy dog, lolling richly in a waiting motor-car, who leaped out through the window with terrifying growls, and undertook to harry it, performing just in front of the left caterpillar that progressive three-legged canine dance familiar to all motorists. But a tank is not a motor-car. The fluffy dog conceived a misplaced contempt for its speed. He loitered on the way. There was a surprised and pained exclamation in the canine language, and the fluffy dog, ceasing to exist in the customary three dimensions, passed to the fourth, leaving as a souvenir only the first and second—to wit, length and breadth—upon the asphalt. He that so lately had been a beribboned and pampered darling was now as the shadow of a dream, a breath upon glass, a highly impressionistic silhouette limned against the unsympathetic pavement, above which a fat blond lady tore her costly hair, uttering tragic and vengeful cries. Hastily checking the juggernaut, the flit descended, and was promptly addressed as a murderer by the blond lady. The gob came to the rescue, and learned something to his disadvantage and that of his parentage. Then the sike tactlessly offered his hard-wrung four dollars in reparation. Him she smote upon the ear with violence, and after one in-

effectual attempt to scrape Pettie from the bosom of Mother Earth retired, wailing, to her car, where she ordered the chauffeur to take her to her lawyer.

"And to think," murmured the sike, tenderly caressing the spot where the assault had taken place, "that next month I'll be instilling moral precepts into the minds of the rising generation. Such is life!"

"This is where we oil up," announced the flit, and, having herded his passengers in, went at it.

The delay was untimely. Hardly had the tank, refreshed and lubricated, resumed its way, when above the uproar was heard a sharp "ping!" It was twice repeated.

"Somebody applying for admittance," surmised the sike, in a well-attuned howl.

The gob applied his eye to a rear peep-hole. "It's one of those side-street cops; the bad ones our friend down the Avenue told us about. He's shooting at us."

"A hold-up," observed the flit. He stopped the engine, just as a fourth bullet, deflected from the upper armor, crashed through a brightly illuminated second-story window. There was the sound of a meeting adjourning *sine die*, and an oratorically-garbed gentleman, thrusting his head out of an upper window, sounded the alarum, "Bolsheveeki! Bolsheveeki!" in a melancholy and monotonous shriek.

The pursuing policeman rushed around to the front of the tank. "Lady says you killed her dog," he announced. "Open up."

The flit obligingly opened the door to explain. Straightway the officer's gun was brought to bear upon his head. "Now, you stay put," came the grim order. The flit stayed.

But not for long. Acting, apparently, quite on its own initiative, the machine gun of the forward turret deliberately and noiselessly swung about until it pointed accurately at the third button, counting upward, of the policeman's tunic. It is very disconcerting to have a machine gun aim itself at the pit of one's stomach, particularly when there is no evidence as to whether it is loaded or not. And a machine gun always looks loaded.

The cop blinked and wavered. A solemn voice emerged from the hollow interior:

"Who touches a hair of yon red head
Dies like a dog! March on!" he said."

"Whaddye mean, 'red head'?" indignantly demanded the flit, who was sensitive on the subject; and he ducked inside seeking explanation.

The gob immediately pulled to the steel door. "We will now parley," he announced.

The officer took off his helmet and fanned a wrinkled brow. "You gotta keep off this street," he said, but without conviction.

"Why?" demanded the gob.

"You're a truck," said the cop.

"You're another," retorted the flit hotly. "We're a pleasure-car; that's what we are!"

"Well, you're a heavy traffic, anyway," argued the cop. "You got no right here."

"Lightest tank in the service," declared the gob. "Less than six tons on the hoof. Stripped down for speed, in light marching accouterment with one day's ammunition and a marked-down meal ticket, we're only—"

"For Gawd's sake!" broke in the harassed officer; "git off my beat before I report yer, if I can think of some-thin' to report that the Cap would believe."

Thus delivered from the Philistines, the equipage proceeded, amid the wonder and consternation of an ear-smitten public. But there was one who paid no tribute of notice to its thunderous progress. He stood on the corner of Fifth Avenue, and gazed into vacancy. The gleam of his candid shirt-front attracted the eye of the gob, who was acting as lookout.

"Lighthouse off the port bow," he informed the chauffeur. "Seems to be deserted. Run alongside; I fain would hail it."

The tank, after a preliminary wobble, drew up, facing the abstracted individual. He deigned to droop an uninterested eye at it, and straightway resumed his contemplation of nothingness. The gob semi-emerging from the tank's door, addressed him.

"Cab, sir?"

"Eh? What?" said the other vaguely.

"Taxi, sir? Fine night for a ride," said the gob persuasively.

"Certainly," assented the bystander with the air of one who welcomes any diversion, however slight. He stepped inside.

"Where to, sir?"

The fare considered. "Eight-seventy-seven Park Avenue," he said at length.

"What for?" interposed the flit with suspicion.

"To make a polite and formal call on a young lady."

"Look at the time," protested the flit. "Won't she be asleep?"

"Not after little Pussyfoot enters the block," said the fare with conviction. "Besides that—have I hired this hack or haven't I?"

"You sure have," confirmed the gob. "Montmorency, behave!" he admonished the flit. "We are about to go into Society. I can tell it by the address. By the left wheel, *hrrumph!*"

"One moment," said the passenger. "It is my duty to tell you that Bingle Foxley will be coming down the Avenue drunk and chiefly on the wrong side, about this hour."

"Who's he?" demanded the chauffeur.

"The Demon Motorist. Traffic rules are a red rag to him. As a cousin of the Big Chief he's immune from arrest, and gets a clear path."

"What's the big idea?" demanded the flit.

"Just so that you can slide out the way when you hear his siren," returned the fare, with apparent innocence.

The flit grinned. "Ick hobby dick, Steefen, as we say in Coblenz," he observed. "We're off."

The Fifth Avenue traffic obligingly made way again. After essaying several polite and casual observations in a stentorian tone, with the effect of a microbe's whisper, the passenger gathered together his vocal powers, and stuck his voice into the gob's ear.

"I want to explain. I'm going to LET YOU INTO A LITTLE SECRET," he bellowed into a suddenly developed stillness, consequent upon the flit's shutting off power at a crowded corner.

"One little tone louder," suggested the gob, "and you'll let in South Norwalk and the Oranges."

"Let me explain to you all," said the passenger while the gathering crowd outside passed the word that the tank was conveying a violently mad German spy to the asylum. "I'm very much interested in—"

"Not me!" expostulated the flit. "The last guy in a dress suit that explained what he was very much interested in, got me very much interested too, and stung me four months' pay for four cents' worth of phony stock."

"This is a young lady," said the other, with dignity. "She objects to me because she says I am too proper and conventional to be really human."

"Are you?" inquired the sike with interest.

"Before the war, possibly. I admit it."

"And the war cured you?"

"Judge for yourself. The third day of the Argonne debate I nearly got court-martialed for biting a chunk out of my captain's ear. It was dark, and I thought when we came together after the charge and he tried to gouge my left eye out, that he was a Fritzie. Now I put it to you as pals, is that overrefined and finicky?"

"Pals is right," stated the flit heartily, "if you was at Argonne Woods. And as man to man and one having experience, I'd advise you to handle her likewise. Not bite her ear off, you get me? But join the tanks and treat 'em rough."

"Precisely why I hired this cab."

"So woman is your trouble," observed the sike. "I salute you, Mr. Reuben Renssalaer Watts."

"The devil you do!" retorted that gentleman. "When did you graduate into the Intelligence Department? Or have I met you in a previous existence?"

"Neither. It is quite simple," began the sike, when a swelling, soaring, blare from up the Avenue cut him short.

"Mr. Foxley requests the courtesy of a clear path," said Mr. Watts.

"Sure," remarked the flit between his teeth. "Sic 'em, Maudie!"

Gathering speed, the tank proceeded to weave and writhe across the roadway in a manner suggestive of a beetle with the stomach-ache. Hoots, rude, imperative and monitory, sounded from ahead. A huge green car manned by a huge red youth came rushing down upon them. At sight of the tank, the car emitted a sublimated yawp of surprise and horror followed by penetrating shrieks as the brakes bit in, the youth uttered a whoop of desperation, the outfit hit the unmoved tank slantwise, skimmed across the sidewalk on two wheels and sought cover in a window placarded "Special Bargains in Lingerie" whence presently emerged the almost total ruin of Mr. Foxley draped pinkly in a chemise. It beat the air with frenzied hands, yelled feebly, and disappeared around the corner in the direction of its club. Revivified later (though not by the usual agencies, which he resolutely refused, to the alarm of his fellows), Mr. Foxley related how, while driving quietly down the Avenue he had been beset by a mud-turtle in armor. A very large, ferocious, prehistoric mud-turtle, waving an American flag, which without provocation had attacked his unoffending car, bitten off its two front wheels and chased it through a plate-glass window. And as for him, he wouldn't care if July first came to-morrow! He was off it!

"Where do they come from and why did they let 'em out?" demanded Mr. Foxley passionately.

The maligned tank, passing upon its sentimental quest, was now spreading the echoes of Bedlam through peaceful Park Avenue. At number eight-seventy-seven, the equipage stopped. The clamor didn't. A surprised and extremely attractive face beneath the cap of the National League for Woman's Service Motor Corps appeared at a third-floor window.

"Shut off! Shut off!" yelled Reuben Renssalaer Watts. "I want to talk to her."

"Can't," bellowed the flit. "She's jammed."

The face at the window became indignant. It made urgent gestures like a policeman.

"The lady wants us to move on," the gob informed the perspiring Mr. Watts.

Out upon the sidewalk stepped the sike. He faced the lovely and indignant apparition overhead and squared his manly form. With his right hand he majestically indicated the zenith; his left he placed tenderly upon the pit of his stomach. Immediately he thrust his left north-northeast and started a pivot-blow with the other. He then boxed the compass in swift, successive two-arm movements. The ornament of the window nodded and disappeared.

"See here!" said Mr. Watts. "Do you *know* that lady?"

"I do not," returned the sike, "though I live in hopes."

"Then why the convulsions?" demanded Mr. Watts severely.

"Semaphoring, my dear sir. I simply wigwagged the lady that if she would descend to Mother Earth, a communication of semi-official import having a vital bearing on her prospects in life would be made to her. *Or* words to that effect," said the sike. "The rest is up to you."

The final observation might well have been addressed to the Mayor of New Rochelle, as, coincident with its utterance the chauffeur had stilled his engine. He joined the sidewalk group, followed by the gob. The girl emerged.

"Is it an ambulance job?" she asked professionally.

"No, madam," answered the sike.

"Then why did you S. O. S. me?"

Mr. Reuben Rensselaer Watts stepped forward. "Renny!" she exclaimed and turned to a pink so delicate and bewitching that the gob hastily and surreptitiously extracted his beloved quid and tossed it under the iron monster.

"A social call," said that gentleman. "Good evening, Carey." He stepped forward and with nonchalance and promptitude kissed the newcomer fair and full upon the lips.

"Renny!" gasped the girl; and the pink deepened to a fiery red. "Wh-Wh-What—how—are you crazy?"

"I've joined the tanks," exclaimed Mr. Watts urbanely. "Treat 'em rough' is our motto. Come and have a joy-ride on me."

The girl recovered herself. "Who are these gentlemen?"

"Hanged if I know. I hired the crew with the ship and they are now my fellow piratical voyagers on faerie seas forlorn. Fellows, this is Miss Carey Vail."

"Pleased to meetcher," said the flit, stepping forward courteously. "My name's Mr. Slayter. The gob, here, is Chaw Veeder. He's rough stuff from the gas-house, but with ladies present he'll kindly soft-pedal. The other guy is a stuffed professor at home, at present considerable alive. Name, Perfessor James." He turned to address Watts. "Now, where to, sir?"

"Where do you suggest?"

"If this is a ladies' game," responded the flit tentatively, "there's a party named Miss Nora McSears who cashes at an all-night restaurant on East Fifty-eighth Street, very clean and respectable."

"Right! Go to Fifty-eighth Street. Will you get in, Carey?"

Miss Carey Vail sniffed the air daintily and observed the tank with doubt. "Do you think your steed is safe?" she asked.

"He's uncertain when hungry," explained the gob; "but he's just fed. He's had one small dog, one large fruit-stand, three cans of garbage, a corner of the Waldorf-Astoria and a chew of the best plug. You could trust him to tow a baby-carriage down Peacock Alley."

Miss Vail embarked. Her next observation, "Do behave yourself, Renny," was inferred rather than heard, in the commotion of their turning. Nor was their converse thereafter, though earnest, of import to the others, who considerably concentrated their attention upon the outer world.

The Recherché Restaurant was doing a languid, ten-cent-to-a-quarter trade, when East Fifty-eighth Street burst into "The Anvil Chorus." Its entire clientèle

rushed to the door, followed by a tall, calm-eyed girl with the cash-register in her arms. The tank brought up with a lurch opposite her.

"Good evening, Miss Nora," said the flit, emerging.

"Good evening, yourself, and who are *you*?" returned Miss McSears placidly.

The flit assumed an air of profound injury. "Did you or did you not, one year back, come St. Patrick's Day, after the Club dance at camp, take my regimental pin to wear and say you'd never forget Private F. Slayter, now corporal?"

"Maybe I did," admitted the girl. "But your face was clean then."

"I've joined the tanks since," said Corporal Slayter. "Treat 'em rough." Selecting the nearest dimple in Miss McSears's piquant face, he saluted it in form.

"Move on!" cried that young lady, helpless by reason of the cash-machine, but wrathful. "My father's a policeman and I'll be telephoning for him."

"Ask him can I keep company with his daughter," suggested the unperturbed flit. "We'll move on when you move with us."

"In *that*?" retorted the girl, bestowing a scornful look upon the monster. "I don't believe it's even respectable. Who's in there?"

Responding to the flit's unspoken appeal, the woman passenger stepped out. "I'm Carey Vail," she began in her quiet, assured voice. "You may know—"

"Hello, Vail," interrupted Miss McSears.

"Why, Mac! Bless your old heart! How are you?"

The two did not fall on each other's neck. They shook hands in manly fashion. "This is one of our emergency volunteers for the 'flu' work," explained the girl in uniform. "They don't make them any better."

"They don't need to, as far's I'm concerned," murmured Mr. Slayter, relieving the bearer of the cash-register. "Are you on for our little party, Nora?"

"Wait till I telephone for a substitute," said Miss McSears. "And do you behave yourself, you with your 'Nora'!"

Upon her return, after some delay, there was heard issuing from the tank's interior dolorous music, in the sike's plaintive baritone:

"No one to pity him, none to cay-ress
No one to help *him* in his sad dy-stress."

"The Sweet Singer of Michigan has broken his parole," observed the gob. "Hey, you inside, what's on your bursting chest?"

"I'm lonely," stated the sike. "All my lovely companions are faded and gone. Captive to the fair sex.

"Oh, bury me on the lone pray-ree!
Where the wild ki-yotes can't pester me."

"Goodness gracious! What's that?" queried Miss McSears.

"I believe it's some kind of a professor," explained Miss Vail, as the flit obligingly turned an interior light upon the sike. Miss McSears viewed the exhibit with critical approval.

"It looks good to me," she said. "Couldn't we get somebody to take care of it for the evening and make this a real party? Any of your crowd on, Vail?"

"Eleven twenty-five," said the corps-girl, examining a wrist-watch. "Dolly Barrett'll just be coming off duty. She'd fit in."

"Great!" assented Miss McSears, and the two girls retired to telephone.

"Did you get her?" chorused the crew of the tank, when they returned.

"Of course," said Miss Vail. "We told her to meet us at eleven-fifty on the south side of Columbus Circle where Broadway comes in."

"That's a nice, retired spot for a tryst," said Mr. Watts sardonically. "Did you tell her how we were coming?"

"No. I just said we'd pick her up in a car."

"She'll be surprised."

"Surprise will do her good. She's been overworked lately and needs livening up."

Surprise was obviously the trysted one's portion when,

with the sound of earthquake and avalanche, battle, murder, and sudden death, the "cab" arrived. Nor was the initial surprise the only one. A perfect stranger with a long, lean, pleasant face stepped out and regarded her with appreciative and twinkling eyes. In the background she dimly apprehended Miss Vail and Miss McSears. On his part the sike contemplated a small, trim young person with very black hair, very gray eyes under black brows and lashes and a mouth that was an enticement to disorderly conduct. His bedazzled regard failed to note certain features of her costume. His once professorial spirit was in a turmoil, a reckless, desperate glow.

"Good evening," he said rapidly. "We've come to take you riding. Let me help you in. My name is Follansbee James. I've joined the tanks. Treat 'em rough." Smack! The disorderly conduct was committed.

"Attention!" snapped the enraged victim of the caress.

The sike fell into a rigor, a paralysis, intended for a salute. His horrified eyes were riveted on the newcomer's nearest shoulder. A silver bar shone there.

"Lord help me! I've kissed my superior officer," groaned the sike, and collapsed into the waiting arms of the gob.

The others immediately supplied a chorus of explanation and apology, greatly enjoyed and appreciated by the gathering crowd. "Let's get out of here," said Lieutenant Dolly Barrett, bewilderedly rubbing the corner of her chin (for the sike had been nervous and his marksmanship below par). "Go into the Park, where it's quiet."

Their progress spread a horrific stridor through the peace and decorum of the Park's ordered avenues, and the squirrels awoke in the tree-tops, gibbering with terror, and the birds took wing and fled into the unknown, and the new hippopotamus of the Zoo, surmising that the day of judgment was upon him, repented of his sins in a wail that scarred the ear-drums of the sleeping neighborhood; and policemen, singly and in squads, rushed to the scene and retired before the sight of a moving fortress display-

ing the American flag, and Reuben Renssalaer Watts chose that time as propitious for a whirlwind advance, under cover of the riot, upon the heart of Miss Carey Vail. As he pleaded earnestly, and with vast expenditure of lung-power, which did not reach beyond the attentive ear of the girl, who was listening with an expression somewhere between happiness, panic, and surrender, the flit tactlessly and abruptly shut down the power to inquire his way, and Mr. Watts was heard (from the Battery on the south to the Bronx on the north) proclaiming the finale and climax of his wooing:

“—GOING TO MARRY ME THIS VERY NIGHT, AS IS!”

A dead, blank, dismayed silence supervened. The unintentional eavesdroppers stared at each other and away from the pair. Ten blocks distant the hippopotamus laughed raucously. Mr. Watts, justly indignant, turned upon the chauffeur.

“Keep her going, you fourth-rate, donkey-engine misfit!” he roared, in tones which proved that he didn’t care who heard him this time.

“What church?” inquired the flit promptly.

“Not any church,” cried Miss Carey Vail. “I want to go ho-o-ome.”

“Oh, be a sport, Vail,” adjured her superior officer. “He looks all right to me. Why not marry him and put him out of his misery?”

“Go on; do!” urged Miss McSears. “It’ll be so romantic.”

“Maybe it’d be catching,” hopefully suggested Corporal Slayter, who appeared to be holding Miss McSears’s hand.

“Happy thought!” contributed the sike. “Don’t spoil the evening’s fun just because of a weak prejudice about formality.”

“Oh, I think you’re all mad!” declared Miss Vail tremulously, and suddenly, despite her uniform, she looked very small and feminine and helpless. “You, most of all, Renny. I don’t know what’s come to you.”

“I’ve joined the tanks,” said Reuben Renssalaer Watts promptly. “And—”

"Don't!" wailed Miss Vail, half a second too late to forestall the action which went with the statement. "I want to go ho-o-ome!" she faltered. But there was more bewilderment than conviction in her appeal.

"Directly after the ceremony," promised the progressive wooer. "We'll ride up in my special taxi and break the news to the family."

"Look here, folkses," broke in the gob. "I'm all for this Lohengrin-Mendelssohn stuff. But it'll take some scheming. We've got the rest of the night, free of entanglements and engagements, except the one we've just been witness to, is it not?"

"It is," responded a chorus, minus the voice of Miss Carey Vail who was temporarily speechless.

"All right, I'm going to blow to supper."

"Not at twelve-fifteen, in this man's burg," corrected Mr. Watts. "It's closed."

"If you can give a wedding party, I guess I can give a supper party," retorted the gob. "And I'm going to if I have to hold up somebody else's. Corporal, conduct Airy Fairy Lillian up Mr. Fifth's well-known avenue while I man the lookout, and be ready to stop on signal."

The signal was given, opposite a house of modest size (for that part of the thoroughfare) with evidences of activity in the front rooms. The gob ran up the steps and was met by a flustered-looking person who made gestures of expostulation, which presently were mollified to gestures of deprecation.

"Come one, come all," invited the gob, returning. "There'll be a short wait while my friend in the shirt-sleeves—"

"Who is this guy, Chaw?" demanded the flit.

"He's the butler."

"Whose butler?" queried Miss McSears.

"Don't make any odds whose. He's ours at present."

"How did you get him?" questioned Watts.

"It's a long story of my seamy past," answered the gob. "He's an ex-con, and I've got a strangle-hold on him. So he's invited us to supper and when the family gets home from the country in the morning he can fix up his own

explanation of the ice-box to suit himself and them. I've ordered fizz."

"That's all very well," observed Miss McSears with firmness. "But I don't go to midnight suppers in other folks' houses, with a bunch of strangers—"

"Strangers once but lovers now," stated the flit firmly, "speaking for self *and* lady friend."

"—and no chaperon," pursued the spokeswoman of the proprieties, reddening but obstinate. "So you count—"

"Silence in the ranks!" ordered Dolly Barrett. "I'm an officer and a widow. Is that enough?"

"Plenty for me, and praise to Heaven for the good news," said the sike, enthusiastically. "I don't mean the officer part," he added significantly, "but the other."

Mr. Watts regarded him curiously. "There may be more in these Western universities than a Harvard man would suspect," he murmured.

"And to think," sighed the sike, "that a few weeks hence I shall be pouring pious platform platitudes into the happy ears of inattentive youth!"

"Forward in light foraging order!" commanded the gob.

The party entered the house, which was evidently being hastily cleaned for the return of the owners. A subdued noise as of servants in commotion could be heard in the rear. On a hall stand stood a collection of mail in three piles. The flit chancing to glance at it, stood petrified. Selecting a post-card he advanced upon the rear of the unheeding gob, turned up the bottom of the wide and floppy left trouser-leg, read from the sewn-in slip the name inscribed thereon, compared it with the address on the post-card, turned down the trouser-leg to one fold and with a sudden, sardonic inspiration not only left it so, but adjusted the other one to match it.

"Mr. Schuyler Tappan Veeder," he observed with concentrated bitterness, straightening up.

"Here," responded the gob, cheerfully. "What about it?"

"This is *your* joint," declared the flit in solemn accusation.

"Not while my fond parents enjoy their present health," was the genial reply.

But the soul of Corporal Slayter was hot with suspicion. "What kinda con game you been workin' on me?" he said, surlily. "Call yourself Chaw Veeder."

"Barring the presence of ladies, you're a liar," retorted the gob promptly. "It's my pals call me Chaw. Which reminds me." Producing a rich-hued bar from his pocket, he bit off a generous chunk and expertly stowed it. The angry eyes of his pal flickered a little. But he was unconvinced.

"You're phony," he growled. "A masqueradin' dude." He pointed to the trousers which he had left "cuffed." "That's your style," he asserted. "Me, I'm through. I'll not be made a guy of. C'mon, Nora."

The gob stretched forth an iron-muscled hand which he inserted forcibly and affectionately between the flit's neck and his collar. "Pause a moment, Claude," he besought. "Girls, will you kindly muffle your ears? Thanks. Now, Freddie, you lop-sided, cross-grained, bone-headed, swivel-eared, pizen-souled descendant of ten generations of mule-thieves, before I break your jaw in three places at once, listen while I tell you what you are." And he told him. But of the 'telling there is no record, because after the preface, Mr. Watts retired for air and the sike ran out to seek a pencil and paper and returned too late for the exordium. The flit, spell-bound, relaxed his expression of disfavor. When it was over he bent down and readjusted the gob's trouser-legs to the regulation straightness. Apology could go no further.

"You win, Chaw," said he shamefacedly. "Speed up the wedding feast."

It is recorded in the unwritten history of Fifth Avenue's most costly and exclusive section, that there came, upon a midnight clear, a din as of ten thousand structural riveters in progressive action, giving place to sounds of revelry by early morning, which in turn was succeeded by the Anvil Chorus, above the surface of which soared a valiant barytone proclaiming, "The Voice that Breathed

O'er Eden." Mr. Chaw Veeder's supper-party, back in the tank, was adjourning to night-court to seek a marrying magistrate. For, as in the old song, love (in the person of Mr. Reuben Renssalaer Watts) had found out the way, and the telephone, reaching a friendly judge, had arranged a special emergency license.

Many queer equipages with strange cargoes visit night-court on sundry errands; but the tank with its wedding-party broke the record.

Court adjourned informally, to rush out and ascertain who was bombing the locality and why. When the party entered, they beheld two policemen struggling to extricate the magistrate from the frantic embrace of Mr. Bingle Foxley, who was yelling:

"Save me! It's coming after me. I hear it. Don't let it get me, Judge!"

When at length his Honor was released, the sike greeted him with surprise.

"It's you, is it?"

"It's me," agreed the magistrate. "Or if not me, I." He was the bearded victim of "*Cherchez la Chicken*."

"We found him," remarked the sike, indicating Mr. Reuben Renssalaer Watts.

"So I perceive. It's a small world."

"Small like a Harlem flat," confirmed Miss Nora McSears discontentedly. "You can't turn around in it without rousing the family. *That*," she pursued, pointing out to Corporal Slayter one of the policemen engaged in preventing Mr. Foxley from crawling into the commitment file, "is Pa."

"Howdy, Pa!" said the flit.

"Whaddye mean, 'Pa'?" demanded the thunderstruck officer.

"In-law," explained Mr. Slayter. "To-be," he added.

"Perhaps," amended Miss McSears.

"Sure thing," asseverated the flit blithely. "It's in the air. You can't dodge it."

"Other things difficult to dodge are in the air," observed the magistrate. "Reuben, as friend to friend and unofficially, how did you get these?"

"By the hour," replied Mr. Watts. "I hired 'em."

"Are you responsible for their actions?"

"Upon and after the hour of 11:05 P.M., I am."

"You escape," pronounced the magistrate. "At 11:02 P.M. I am informed, an armored tank filled with desperadoes, I. W. W. Bolsheviks, anarchists, nihilists, prohibitionists and other enemies of the public welfare, invaded West Forty-fourth Street and did there and then interrupt an orderly meeting of the Society for the Abolition of Tobacco, Bridge, Dancing and other Hellish Habits, by felonious means, to wit: firing upon it with machine guns, gatlings, howitzers, hand-grenades, rifles, revolvers and sundry lethal weapons, against the ordinances duly made and provided for the maintenance of the peace."

"So help me God," intoned a large, solemn, pulpy person, rising in his seat.

"That's the guy," cried the flit, "that called us 'Bol-she-vee-ki!' Lemme attim."

"Then you admit that you are them," said the magistrate. "Or, if not them, they."

"We do," said the gob; "with mitigating circumstances."

"There is a warrant out against you."

A blond and frescoed portent projected itself upward from a side bench. "Make it two, Judge. And make the second one for murder."

"Saints preserve us!" groaned the sike. "The sorrowing protectress of the silhouetted pup!"

"It is a small world," repeated the magistrate. "This gentleman (indicating the stricken Mr. Foxley) who originally came here for the purpose of taking the pledge, now prefers the charge that you instigated to attack him without provocation a prehistoric monster of the dragon or fire-spouting persuasion which, after destroying his automobile, chased him through a plate-glass window and totally wrecked his nerves. Comparing his description of the monster with my own impression of your vehicle, and remembering that the female of the species is more deadly than the male, I conclude that it is her. Or, if not her, it. What have you to say?"

"Just this," answered Mr. Watts with annoyance, "I came here to be married, not prosecuted. Come now, Hartley, as friend to friend, can't you fix this? It may be my last chance."

"Your friend with the talent for blackmail seems to be a person of infinite resource," said the magistrate, glancing toward the sike. "Has he any suggestions?"

"If I may be permitted," said the sike, modestly rising, "I suggest, first, that Mr. Foxley is too good a sport to spoil a wedding, if assured that the groom will never again travel Fifth Avenue in a tank. (Mr. Foxley grunted.) As for the noble cause of Suppression of Tobacco *et cetera*, I propose a generous epithalamic contribution thereto by the happy bridegroom. We now come to the ill-fated canine, and its sorrowing owner. Though myself in a state of genteel poverty, I will gladly start a subscription to bury it, or if that prove impracticable, to have it pasted in a scrap-book, with appropriate honors."

"Nothin' doin'!" asserted the bereaved blonde in angry tones. "I wanta tell you—"

"One moment, please. Would it not soothe your injured feelings to be invited to the wedding and to sign as legal witness? There is a reporter present, and I assume that the nuptials of Mr. Reuben Renssalaer Watts with Miss Carey Vail will receive a meed of desirable publicity extending to all who participate."

"Not *the* Miss Carey Vail!" exclaimed the awe-struck blonde, who went into Society eagerly, though vicariously, through the medium of the daily press.

"The same," declared Mr. Watts. "Positively last appearance in that rôle. That is," he added anxiously, "if you accept our earnest invitation to come to the wedding."

"Chawmed, I'm suah," murmured the lady, and proceeded to powder her nose from an apparatus concealed in a dangling bag.

The sike felt a soft touch on his elbow. Lieutenant Dolly Barrett's large gray eyes glowed warmly up into his.

"You ought to be running the Peace Conference," she opined.

"And to think," mourned the sike, "that next month I'll be acting the melancholy mentor to a flock of corn-fed prairie-rubes."

"Court will convene in my private room for matrimonial purposes at once," proclaimed the magistrate.

The ceremony was brief and business-like. The witnesses were the sike and Mrs. Barrett, quite close together, the flit and Miss McSears (bracketed by the former), the gob, with rating and ship attached, Mr. Foxley in a shaken hand, and Mrs. Eudora Fotheringay in letters half an inch high and ninety degrees slant. The whole party attended by the court officials went out to see the pair off. The flit, saluting, stepped forward.

"Cab, sir?"

"Certainly," assented the bridegroom.

"Certainly not," amended the bride.

"Not?" queried the flit, crestfallen.

"Taxi," said the new Mrs. Watts decisively, hailing one as it rounded the corner.

"Cab, lady?" coyly invited the flit, turning to Miss McSears, as the bridal couple were whirled away.

"Subway," retorted Pa McSears emphatically, "speaking for self and daughter."

"Cab, sir?" the operator solicited Mr. Bingle Foxley.

"Help!" responded that gentleman, making a leap for the nearest haven, which chanced to be Mrs. Fotheringay's limousine, where he was hospitably received.

"Cab, Chaw?" cried the desperate flit, seeing his custom dropping away.

"Life is sweet," observed the gob, and followed Mr. Foxley into his perfumed retirement.

"Cab, buddy?" almost wept Corporal Slayter, addressing himself in a seductive coo to Professor Follansbee James. "And sister," he added, noting the confidential juxtaposition of the two heads.

"We are walking, thank you so much," said Lieutenant Barrett sweetly.

"Old Bird," the sorrowing flit addressed the metallic accomplice of his crimes, "we are, as it were, dumped into Cupid's ash-can. Cheer up! I will never desert

you." His eyes fell upon the legend, "To be returned." "I'd forgotten about that," he murmured. "Where to, I wonder?" He reversed the placard and was confronted by this warning in red and minatory letters:

Do Not Operate

Condemned as

DANGEROUS

The flit cast a pensive eye up the street where the dust of the bridal departure still hung, shifted it to the wake of the Fotheringay limousine bearing the gob and the reformed Foxley from the stricken field, glanced yearningly toward the corner where Miss Nora McSears, temporarily a parental captive, threw him a swift and comforting signal, and regarded with benignity two uniformed figures marching along the sidewalk side-by-side, in that sweet accord which apostles of the millennium prescribe not alone for the lion and the lamb, but also for the officer and the soldier in the ranks.

"Dangerous," he repeated, as a grin, appreciative but tender, lighted up his rugged features. Then, with conviction, "I'll say it is!"

McClure's Magazine

YOU'VE GOT TO BE SELFISH

BY

EDNA FERBER

YOU'VE GOT TO BE SELFISH¹

By EDNA FERBER

WHEN you try to do a story about three people like Sid Hahn and Mizzi Markis and Wallie Ascher you find yourself pawing around among the personalities, helplessly. For the three of them are what is known in newspaper parlance as national figures. One n. f. is enough for any short story. Three would swamp a book. It's like one of those plays advertised as having an all-star cast. By the time each luminary has come on, and been greeted, and done his twinkling, the play has faded into the background. You can't see the heavens for the stars.

Surely Sid Hahn, like the guest of honor at a dinner, needs no introduction. And just as surely will he be introduced. He has been described elsewhere and often; perhaps nowhere more concisely than on page 16, paragraph two, of a volume that shall be nameless, though quoted, thus:

"Sid Hahn, erstwhile usher, call-boy, press agent, advance man, had a genius for things theatrical. It was inborn. Dramatic, sensitive, artistic, intuitive, he was often rendered inarticulate by the very force and variety of his feelings. A little, rotund, ugly man, with the eyes of a dreamer, the wide, mobile mouth of a humorist, the ears of a comic ol' clo'es man. His generosity was proverbial, and it amounted to a vice."

Not that that covers him. No one paragraph could. You turn a fine diamond this way and that, and as its facets catch the light you say, "It's scarlet! No—it's blue! No—rose!—orange!—lilac!—no—"

That was Sid Hahn.

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I suppose he never really sat for a photograph and yet you saw his likeness in all the magazines. He was snapped on the street, and in the theatre, and even up in his famous library-study-office on the sixth and top floor of the Thalia Theatre Building. Usually with a fat black cigar, unlighted, in one corner of his commodious mouth. Everyone interested in things theatrical (and whom does that not include?) knew all about Sid Hahn—and nothing. He had come, a boy, from one of those middle-western towns with a highfalutin Greek name. Parthenon, Ohio, or something incredible like that. No one knows how he first approached the profession which he was to dominate in America. There's no record of his having asked for a job in a theatre, and received it. He oozed into it, indefinitely, and moved with it, and became a part of it and finally controlled it. Satellites, fur-collared and pseudo-successful, trailing in his wake, used to talk loudly of I-knew-him-when. They all lied. It had been Augustin Daly, dead these many years, who had first recognized in this boy the genius for discovering and directing genius. Daly was, at that time, at the zenith of his career—managing, writing, directing, producing. He fired the imagination of this stocky, gargoyle-faced boy with the luminous eyes and the humorous mouth. I don't know that Sid Hahn, hanging about the theatre in every kind of menial capacity, ever said to himself in so many words:

"I'm going to be what he is. I'm going to concentrate on it. I won't let anything or anybody interfere with it. Nobody knows what I'm going to be. But I know . . . And you've got to be selfish. You've got to be selfish."

Of course no one ever really made a speech like that to himself, even in the Horatio Alger books. But if the great ambition and determination running through the whole fibre of his being could have been crystallized into spoken words they would have sounded like that.

By the time he was forty-five he had discovered more stars than Copernicus. They were not all first magnitude

twinklers. Some of them even glowed so feebly that you could see their light only when he stood behind them, the steady radiance of his genius shining through. But taken as a whole they made a brilliant constellation, furnishing much of the illumination for the brightest thoroughfare in the world.

He had never married. There are those who say that he had had an early love affair, but that he had sworn not to marry until he had achieved what he called success. And by that time it had been too late. It was as though the hot flame of ambition had burned out all his other passions. Later they say he was responsible for more happy marriages contracted by people who did not know that he was responsible for them, than a popular East Side shadchen. He grew a little tired, perhaps, of playing with make-believe stage characters, and directing them, so he began to play with real ones, like God. But always kind.

No woman can resist making love to a man as indifferent as Sid Hahn appeared to be. They all tried their wiles on him; the red-haired ingénues, the blonde soubrettes, the stately leading ladies, the war horses, the old-timers, the ponies, the prima donnas. He used to sit there in his great, luxurious, book-lined inner office, smiling and inscrutable as a plump joss-house idol, while the fair ones burnt incense and made offering of shewbread. Figuratively he kicked over the basket of shewbread and of the incense said, "Take away that stuff! It smells!"

Not that he hated women. He was afraid of them, at first. Then, from years of experience with the femininity of the theatre, not nearly afraid enough. So, early, he had locked that corner of his mind, and had thrown away the key. When, years after, he broke in the door, lo! (as they say when an elaborate figure of speech is being used) lo! the treasures therein had turned to dust and ashes.

It was he who had brought over from Paris to the American stage the famous Renée Paterne, of the incor-

rigible eyes. She made a fortune and swept the country with her song about those delinquent orbs. But when she turned them on Hahn, in their first interview in his office, he regarded her with what is known as a long level look. She knew at that time not a word of English. Sid Hahn was ignorant of French. He said, very low, and with terrible calm to Wallie Ascher who was then acting as a sort of secretary, "Wallie, can't you do something to make her stop rolling her eyes around at me like that? It's awful! She makes me think of those heads you shy balls at, out at Coney. Take away my inkwell."

Renée had turned swiftly to Wallie and had said something to him in French. Sid Hahn cocked a quick ear. "What's that she said?"

"She says," translated the obliging and gifted Wallie, "that monsieur is a woman-hater."

"My God! I thought she didn't understand English!"

"She doesn't. But she's a woman. Not only that, she's a Frenchwoman. They don't need to know a language to understand it."

"Where did you get that, h'm? That wasn't included in your Berlitz course, was it?"

Wallie Ascher had grinned—that winning flash lighting up his dark, keen face. "No, I learned that in another school."

Wallie Ascher's early career in the theatre, if repeated here, might almost be a tiresome repetition of Hahn's beginning. And what Augustin Daly had been to Sid Hahn's imagination and ambition, Sid Hahn was to Wallie's. Wallie, though, had been born to the theatre—if having a tumbler for a father and a prestidigitator's foil for a mother can be said to be a legitimate entrance into the world of the theatre.

He had been employed about the old Thalia for years before Hahn noticed him. In the beginning he was a spindle-legged office boy in the up-stairs suite of the firm of Hahn & Lohman, theatrical producers, the kind of office boy who is addicted to shrill clear whistling unless very firmly dealt with. No one in the outer office realized how faultless, how rhythmic were the arpeggios

and cadences that issued from those expertly puckered lips. There was about his performance an unerring precision. As you listened you felt that his ascent to the inevitable high note was a thing impossible of achievement. Up—up—up he would go, while you held your breath in suspense. And then he took the high note—took it easily, insouciantly—held it, trilled it, tossed it.

"Now look here," Miss Feldman would snap—Miss Feldman of the outer office typewriter—"look here, you kid. Any more of that bird warbling and you go back to the woods where you belong. This ain't a—a—"

"Aviary," suggested Wallie, almost shyly.

Miss Feldman glared. "How did you know that word!"

"I don't know," helplessly. "But it's the word, isn't it?"

Miss Feldman turned back to her typewriter. "You're too smart for your age, you are."

"I know it," Wallie had agreed, humbly.

There's no telling where or how he learned to play the piano. He probably never did learn. He played it, though, as he whistled—brilliantly. No doubt it was as imitative and as unconscious, too, as his whistling had been. They say he didn't know one note from another, and doesn't to this day.

At twenty, when he should have been in love with at least three girls, he had fixed in his mind an image, a dream. And it bore no resemblance to twenty's accepted dreams. At that time he was living in one room (rear) of a shabby rooming house in Thirty-ninth Street. And this was the dream: By the time he was—well, long before he was thirty—he would have a bachelor apartment with a Jap, Saki. Saki was the perfect servant, noiseless, unobtrusive, expert. He saw little dinners just for four—or, at the most, six. And Saki, white-coated, deft, sliding hot plates when plates should be hot; cold plates when plates should be cold. Then, other evenings, alone, when he wanted to see no one—when, in a silken lounging robe (over faultless dinner clothes, of course, and wearing the kind of collar you see in the back of the magazines) he would say, "That will do, Saki."

Then, all evening, he would play softly to himself those little, intimate, wistful Schumann things in the firelight with just one lamp glowing softly—almost sombrely—at the side of the piano (*grand*).

His first real meeting with Sid Hahn had had much to do with the fixing of this image. Of course he had seen Hahn hundreds of times in the office and about the theatre. They had spoken, too, many times. Hahn called him vaguely, "Heh, boy!" but he grew to know him later as Wallie. From errand boy, office boy, call boy, he had become, by that time, a sort of unofficial assistant stage manager. No one acknowledged that he was invaluable about the place, but he was. When a new play was in rehearsal at the Thalia, Wallie knew more about props, business, cues, lights, and lines than the director himself. For a long time no one but Wallie and the director was aware of this. The director never did admit it. But that Hahn should find it out was inevitable.

He was nineteen or thereabouts when he was sent, one rainy November evening, to deliver a play manuscript to Hahn at his apartment. Wallie might have refused to perform an errand so menial, but his worship of Hahn made him glad of any service, however humble. He buttoned his coat over the manuscript, turned up his collar, and plunged into the cold drizzle of the November evening.

Hahn's apartment—he lived alone—was in the early fifties, off Fifth Avenue. For two days he had been ill with one of the heavy colds to which he was subject. He was unable to leave the house. Hence Wallie's errand.

It was Saki—or Saki's equivalent—who opened the door. A white-jacketed, soft-stepping Jap, world old looking like the room glimpsed just beyond. Some one was playing the piano with one finger, horribly.

"You're to give this to Mr. Hahn. He's waiting for it."

"Genelmun come in," said the Jap, softly.

"No, he doesn't want to see me. Just give it to him, see?"

"Genelmun come in." Evidently orders.

"Oh, all right. But I know he doesn't want—"

Wallie turned down his collar with a quick flip, looked

doubtfully at his shoes, and passed through the glowing little foyer into the room beyond. He stood in the doorway. He was scarcely twenty then, but something in him sort of rose, and gathered, and seethed, and swelled, and then hardened. He didn't know it then but it was his great resolve.

Sid Hahn was seated at the piano, a squat, gnomelike little figure, with those big ears, and that plump face, and those soft eyes—the kindest eyes in the world. He did not stop playing as Wallie appeared. He glanced up at him, ever so briefly, but kindly, too, and went on playing the thing with one short forefinger, excruciatingly. Wallie waited. He had heard somewhere that Hahn would sit at the piano thus, for hours, the tears running down his cheeks because of the beauty of the music he could remember but not reproduce; and partly because of his own inability to reproduce it.

The stubby little forefinger faltered, stopped. He looked up at Wallie.

"God, I wish I could play!"

"Helps a lot."

"You play?"

"Yes."

"What?"

"Oh, most anything I have heard once. And some things I kind of make up."

"Compose, you mean?"

"Yes."

"Play one of those."

So Wallie Ascher played one of those. Of course you know "Good Night—Pleasant Dreams." He hadn't named it then. It wasn't even published until almost two years later, but that was what he played for Sid Hahn. Since "After the Ball," no popular song has achieved the success of that one. No doubt it was cheap, and no doubt it was sentimental, but so, too, are the "Suwanee River" and "My Old Kentucky Home," and they'll be singing those when more classical songs have long been forgotten. As Wallie played it his dark, thin face seemed to gleam and glow in the lamplight.

When he had finished playing Sid Hahn was silent for a moment. Then, "What're you going to do with it?"

"With what?"

"With what you've got. You know."

Wallie knew that he did not mean the song he had just played. "I'm going to—I'm going to do a lot with it."

"Yeh, but how?"

Wallie was looking down at his two lean brown hands on the keys. For a long minute he did not answer. Then: "By thinking about it all the time. And working like hell. . . . And you've got to be selfish. . . . You've got to be selfish. . . ."

As Sid Hahn stared at him, as though hypnotized, the Jap appeared in the doorway. So Hahn said, "Stay and have dinner with me," instead of what he had meant to say.

"Oh, I can't! Thanks. I—" He wanted to, terribly, but the thought was too much.

"Better."

They had dinner together. Even under the influence of Hahn's encouragement, and two glasses of mellow wine whose name he did not know, Wallie did not become fatuous. They talked about music—neither of them knew anything about it, really. Wallie confessed that he used it as an intoxicant and a stimulant.

"That's it!" cried Hahn, excitedly. "If I could play I'd have done more."

"Why don't you get one of those piano-players? Whatyoucallems—" then, immediately, "No, of course not."

"Nah, that doesn't do it," said Hahn, quickly. "That's like adopting a baby when you can't have one of your own. It isn't the same. It isn't the same. It looks like a baby, and acts like a baby, and sounds like a baby—but it isn't yours. It isn't you. That's it! It isn't you!"

"Yeh," agreed Wallie, nodding. So perfectly did they understand each other, this ill-assorted pair.

It was midnight before Wallie left. They had both forgotten about the play manuscript whose delivery had

been considered so important. The big room was gracious, quiet, soothing. A fire flickered in the grate. One lamp glowed softly—almost sombrely.

As Wallie rose at last to go he shook himself slightly like one coming out of a trance. He looked about the golden room. "Gee!"

"Yes, but it isn't worth it," said Hahn, "after you've got it."

"That's what they all say,"—grimly—"after they've got it."

The thing that had been born in Sid Hahn's mind thirty years before was now so plainly stamped on this boy's face that Hahn was startled into earnestness. "But I tell you, it's true! It's true!"

"Maybe. Some day, when I'm living in a place like this, I'll let you know if you're right."

In less than a year Wallie Ascher was working with Hahn. No one knew his official title or place. But, "Ask Wallie. He'll know," had become a sort of slogan in the office. He did know. At twenty-one his knowledge of the theatre was infallible (this does not include plays unproduced. In this no one is infallible) and his feeling for it amounted to a sixth sense. There was something uncanny about the way he could talk about Lotta, for example, as if he had seen her; or Mrs. Siddons; or Mrs. Fiske, when she was Minnie Maddern, the soubrette. It was as though he had the power to cast himself back in the past. No doubt it was that power which gave later to his group of historical plays (written by him between the ages of thirty and thirty-five) their convincingness and authority.

When Wallie was about twenty-three or four years old Sid Hahn took him abroad with him on one of his annual scouting trips. Yearly, in the spring, Hahn swooped down upon London, Paris, Berlin, seeking that of the foreign stage which might be translated, fumigated, desiccated or otherwise rendered suitable for home use. He sent Wallie on to Vienna, alone, on the trail of a musical comedy which was rumored to be a second *Merry Widow* in tunefulness, chic and charm. Of course it wasn't. *Merry Widows* rarely repeat themselves. Wallie

wired back to Hahn, as arranged. The telegram is unimportant, perhaps, but characteristic.

Mr. Sid Hahn,
Hotel Savoy,
London,
England.

It's a second all right but not a second *Merry Widow*. Heard of a winner in Budapest shall I go. Spent to-day from eleven to five running around the Ringstrasse looking for mythical creature known as the chic Viennese. After careful investigation wish to be quoted as saying the species if any is extinct.

This, remember, was in the year 1913, B. W. Wallie, obeying instructions, went to Budapest, witnessed the alleged winner, found it as advertised, wired Hahn and was joined by that gentleman three days later.

Budapest, at that time, was still Little Paris, only wickeder. A city of magnificent buildings, and unsalted caviar, and beautiful dangerous women, and frumpy men (civilian) and dashing officers in red pants, and Cigány music, and cafés, and paprika, and two-horse droshkies. Buda, low and flat, lay on one side; Pest, high and hilly, perched picturesquely on the other. Between the two rolled the Blue Danube (which is yellow).

It was there that Hahn and Wallie found Mizzi Markis. Wallie found her, really. Mizzi Markis, then a girl of nineteen, was a hod-carrier.

As Hahn stepped from the train, geometrically square in a long ulster that touched his ears and his heels, Wallie met him with a bound.

"Hello, S. H.! Great to see you! Say, listen, I've found something. I've found something big!"

Hahn had never seen the boy so excited. "Oh, shucks! No play's as good as that."

"Play! It isn't a play."

"Why, you young idiot, you said it was good! You said it was darn good! You don't mean to tell me—"

"Oh, that! That's all right. It's good—or will be when you get through with it."

"What you talking about then? Here, let's take one of these things with two horses. Gee, you ought to smoke a fat black seegar and wear a silk hat when you ride in one of these! I feel like a parade." He was like a boy on a holiday.

"But let me tell you about this girl, won't you?"

"Oh, it's a girl! What's her name? What's she do?"

"Her name's Mizzi."

"Mizzi what?"

"I don't know. She's a hod-carrier. She—"

"That's all right, Wallie. I'm here now. An ice bag on your head and real quiet for two or three days. You'll come around fine."

But Wallie was almost sulking. "Wait till you see her, S. H. She sings."

"Beautiful, is she?"

"No, not particularly. No."

"Wonderful voice, h'm?"

"N-n-no. I wouldn't say it was what you'd call exactly wonderful."

Sid Hahn stood up in the droshky and waved his short arms in windmill circles. "Well, what the devil does she do then, that's so good! Carry bricks?"

"She is good at that. When she balances that pail of mortar on her head and walks off with it, her arms hanging straight at her sides—"

But Sid Hahn's patience was at an end. "You're a humorist, you are. If I didn't know you I'd say you were drunk. I'll bet you are, anyway. You've been eating paprika, raw. You make me sick."

Inlegant, but expressive of his feelings. But Wallie only said, "You wait. You'll see."

Sid Hahn did see. He saw next day. Wallie woke him out of a sound sleep so that he might see. It was ten-thirty a. m. so that his peevishness was unwarranted. They had seen the play the night before and Hahn had decided that translated and with interpolations (it was a comic opera) it would captivate New York. Then and there he completed the negotiations which Wallie had begun. Hahn was all for taking the first train out, but

Wallie was firm. "You've got to see her, I tell you. You've got to see her."

Their hotel faced the Corso. The Corso is a wide promenade that runs along the Buda bank of the Danube. Across the river, on the hill, the royal palace looks down upon the little common people. In the day the monde and the demi-monde of Budapest walked on the Corso between twelve and one. Up and down. Up and down. The women, tall, dark, flashing-eyed, daringly dressed. The men sallow, meager, and wearing those trousers which, cut very wide and flappy at the ankles, make them the dowdiest men in the world. Hahn's room and Wallie's were on the second floor of the hotel, and at a corner. One set of windows faced the Corso, the river, and Pest on the hill. The other set looked down upon a new building being erected across the way. It was on this building that Mizzi Markis worked as hod-carrier.

The War accustomed us to a million women in overalls doing the work of a million men. We saw them ploughing, juggling steel bars, making shells, running engines, stoking furnaces, handling freight. But to these two American men, at that time, the thing at which these laboring women were employed was dreadful and incredible.

Said Wallie: "By the time we've dressed, and had breakfast, and walked a little and everything it'll be almost noon. And noon's the time. After they've eaten their lunch. But I want you to see her before."

By now his earnestness had impressed Hahn who still feigned an indifference he did not feel. It was about 11:30 when Wallie propelled him by the arm to the unfinished building across the way. And there he met Mizzi.

They were just completing the foundation. The place was a busy hive. Back and forth with pails. Back and forth with loads of bricks.

"What's the matter with the men?" was Hahn's first question.

Wallie explained. "They do the dainty work. They put one brick on top of the other, with a dab of mortar between. But none of the back-breaking stuff for them. The women do that."

And it was so. They were down in the pits mixing the mortar, were the women. They were carrying great pails of it. They were hauling bricks, up one ladder and down. They wore short full skirts with a musical comedy chorus effect. Some of them looked seventy and some seventeen. It was fearful work for a woman. A keen wind was blowing across the river. Their hands were purple.

"Pick Mizzi," said Wallie. "If you can pick her I'll know I'm right. But I know it, anyway."

Five minutes passed. The two men stood silent. "The one with the walk and the face," said Hahn, then. Which wasn't very bright of him, because they all walked and they all had faces. "Going up the pit-ladder now. With the pail on her head." Wallie gave a little laugh of triumph. But then, Hahn wouldn't have been Hahn had he not been able to pick a personality when he saw it.

Years afterward the reviewers always talked of Mizzi's walk. They called it her superb carriage. They didn't know that you have to walk very straight, on the balls of your feet, with your hips firm, your stomach held in flat, your shoulders back, your chest out, your chin out and a little down, if you are going to be at all successful in balancing a pail of mortar on your head. After a while that walk becomes a habit.

"Watch her with that pail," said Wallie.

Mizzi filled the pail almost to the top with the heavy white mixture. She filled it quickly, expertly. The pail, filled, weighed between seventeen and twenty kilos. One kilo is equal to about two and one-fifth pounds. The girl threw down her scoop, stooped, grasped the pail by its two handles and with one superb unbroken motion raised the pail high in her two strong arms and placed it on her head. Then she breathed deeply, once, set her whole figure, turned stiffly, and was off with it. Sid Hahn took a long breath as though he himself had just accomplished the gymnastic feat.

"Well, so far it's pretty good. But I don't know that the American stage is clamoring for any hod-carriers and mortar mixers, exactly."

A whistle blew. Twelve o'clock. Bricks, mortar,

scoops, shovels were abandoned. The women in their great clod-hopping shoes flew chattering to the tiny hut where their lunch boxes were stored. The men followed more slowly, a mere handful of them. Not one of them wore overalls or apron. Out again with their bundles and boxes of food—very small bundles. Very tiny boxes. They ate ravenously the bread and sausage and drank their beer in great gulps. Fifteen minutes after the whistle had blown the last crumb had vanished.

"Now, then," said Wallie. And guided Hahn nearer. He looked toward Mizzi. Everyone looked toward her. Mizzi stood up, brushing crumbs from her lap. She had a little four-cornered black shawl, folded cross-wise, over her head and tied under her chin. Her face was round and her cheeks red. The shawl, framing this, made her look young and cherubic.

She did not put her hands on her hips, or do any of those story-book things. She grinned, broadly, showing strong white teeth, made strong and white through much munching of coarse black bread; not yet showing the neglect common to her class. She asked a question in a loud clear voice.

"What's that?" asked Hahn.

"She's talking a kind of hunky Hungarian, I guess. The people here won't speak German, did you know that? They hate it."

The crowd shouted back with one voice. They settled themselves comfortably, sitting or standing. Their faces held the broad smile of anticipation.

"She asked them what they want her to sing. They told her. It's the same every day."

Mizzi Markis stood there before them in the mud, and clay, and straw of the building debris. And she sang for them a Hungarian popular song of the day which, translated, sounds idiotic and which runs something like this:

"A hundred geese in a row
At the head of the procession
Going into a coop
A stick over his shoulder—"

No, you can't do it. It means less than nothing that way, and certainly would not warrant the shrieks of mirth that came from the audience gathered round the girl. Still, when you recall the words of "A Hot Time":

"When you hear them bells go ting-ling-ling,
All join round and sweetly you must sing
And when the words am through in the chorus all join in
There'll be a *hot time*
In the *old town*
Tonight
My
Ba-
By."

And yet it swept a continent, and Europe, and in Japan they still think it's our national anthem.

When she had finished the crowd gave a roar of delight, and clapped their hands, and stamped their feet, and shouted. She had no unusual beauty. Her voice was untrained, though possessed of strength and flexibility. It wasn't what she had sung, surely. You heard the song in a hundred cafés. Every street boy whistled it. It wasn't that expressive pair of shoulders, exactly. It wasn't a certain soothing tonal quality that made you forget all the things you'd been trying not to remember.

There is something so futile and unconvincing about an attempted description of an intangible thing. Some call it personality; some call it magnetism; some a rhythm sense; and some, genius. It's all these things, and none of them. Whatever it is, she had it. And whatever it is, Sid Hahn has never failed to recognize it.

So now he said, quietly, "She's got it."

"You bet she's got it!" from Wallie.

"She's got more than Renée Paterne ever had. A year of training and some clothes—"

"You don't need to tell me. I'm in the theatrical business, myself."

"I'm sorry," stiffly.

But Hahn, too, was sorry immediately. "You know how I am, Wallie. I like to run a thing off by myself. What do you know about her? Find out anything?"

"Well, a little. She doesn't seem to have any people. And she's decent. Kind of a fierce kid, I guess, and fights when offended. They say she's Polish, not Hungarian. Her mother was a peasant. Her father—nobody knows. I had a dickens of a time finding out anything. The most terrible language in the world—Hungarian. They'll stick a 'b' next to a 'k' and follow it up with a 'z' and put an accent mark over the whole business and call it a word. Last night I followed her home. And guess what!"

"What?" said Hahn, obligingly.

"On her way she had to cross the big square—the one they call Gisela Tér, with all the shops around it. Well, when she came to Gerbeaud's—"

"What's Gerbeaud's?"

"That's the famous tea room and pastry shop where all the swells go and guzzle tea with rum in it and eat cakes—and say! It isn't like our pastry that tastes like sawdust covered with shaving soap. Marvelous stuff, this is!"

After all, he was barely twenty-four. So Hahn said, good-naturedly, "All right, all right. We'll go there this afternoon and eat an acre of it. Go on. When she came to Gerbeaud's—"

"Well, when she came to Gerbeaud's she stopped and stood there, outside. There was a strip of red carpet from the door to the street. You know—the kind they have at home when there's a wedding on Fifth Avenue. There she stood at the edge of the carpet, waiting, her face, framed in that funny little black shawl, turned toward the window, and the tail of the little shawl kind of wagging in the wind. It was cold and nippy. I waited, too. Finally I sort of strolled over to her—I knew she couldn't any more than knock me down—and said, kind of casual, 'What's doing?' She looked up at me, like a kid, in that funny shawl. She knew I was an Englees' right away. I guess I must have a fine open countenance. And I had motioned toward the red carpet, and the crowded windows. Anyway, she opens up with a regular burst of fireworks Hungarian, in that deep voice of hers. Not only that, she acted it out. In two seconds she had on an imaginary coronet and a court train. And haughty! Gosh!

I was sort of stumped, but I said, 'You don't say!' and waited some more. And then they flung open the door of the tea shop thing. At the same moment up dashed an equipage—you couldn't possibly call it anything less—with flunkys all over the outside, like trained monkeys. The people inside the shop stood up, with their mouths full of cake, and out came an old frump with a terrible hat and a fringe. And it was the Arch-Duchess, and her name is Josefa."

"Your story interests me strangely, boy," Hahn said, grinning, "but I don't quite make you. Do Arch-Duchesses go to tea rooms for tea? And what's that got to do with our gifted little hod-carrier?"

"This Duchess does. Believe me, those tarts are good enough for the Queen of Hearts, let alone a duchess, no matter how arch. But the plot of the piece is this. The duchess person goes to Gerbeaud's about twice a week. And they always spread a red carpet for her. And Mizzi always manages to cut away in time to stand there in front of Gerbeaud's and see her come out. She's a gorgeous mimic, that little kid. And though I couldn't understand a word she said I managed to get out of it just this: That some day they're going to spread a red carpet for Mizzi and she's going to walk down it in glory. If you'd seen her face when she said it, S. H., you wouldn't laugh."

"I wouldn't laugh anyway," said Hahn, seriously.

And that's the true story of Mizzi Markis's beginning. Few people know it.

There they were, the three of them. And of the three, Mizzi's ambition seemed to be the fiercest, the most implacable. She worked like a horse, cramming English, French, singing. In some things she was like a woman of thirty; in others a child of ten. Her gratitude to Hahn was pathetic. No one ever doubted that he was in love with her almost from the first—he who had resisted the professional beauties of three decades.

You know she wasn't—and isn't—a beauty, even in that portrait of her by Sargent, with her two black-haired, stunning-looking boys, one on each side. But she was one of those gorgeously healthy women whose very pres-

ence energizes those with whom she comes in contact. And then there was about her a certain bounteousness. There's no other word for it, really. She reminded you of those gracious figures you see posed for pictures entitled "Autumn Harvest."

While she was studying she had a little apartment with a middle-aged woman to look after her, and she must have been a handful. A born cook, she was, and Hahn and Wallie used to go there to dinner whenever she would let them. She cooked it herself. Hahn would give up any engagement for a dinner at Mizzi's. When he entered her little sitting-room his cares seemed to drop from him. She never got over cutting bread as the peasant women do it—the loaf held firmly against her breast, the knife cutting toward her. Hahn used to watch her and laugh. Sometimes she would put on the little black head-shawl of her Budapest days and sing the street-song about the hundred geese in a row. A delightful, impudent figure.

With the very first English she learned she told Hahn and Wallie that some day they were going to spread a fine red carpet for her to tread upon and that all the world would gaze on her with envy. It was in her mind a symbol typifying all that there was of earthly glory.

"It'll be a long time before they do any red carpeting for you, my girl," Sid Hahn had said.

She turned on him fiercely. "I will not rest—I will not eat—I will not sleep—I will not love—until I have it."

Which was, of course, an exaggerated absurdity.

"Oh, what rot!" Wallie Ascher had said, angrily. And then he had thought of his own symbol of success, and his own resolve. And his face had hardened. Sid Hahn looked at the two of them; very young, both of them, very gifted, very electric. Very much in love with each other, though neither would admit it even in their own minds. Both their stern young faces set toward the goal which they thought meant happiness.

Now, Sid Hahn had never dabbled in this new stuff—you know—complexes and fixed ideas and images. But he was a very wise man, and he did know to what an extent these two were possessed by ambition for that which they considered desirable.

He must have thought it over for weeks. He was in love with Mizzi, remember. And his fondness for Wallie was a thing almost paternal. He watched these two for a long, long time, a queer grim little smile on his gargoyle face. And then his mind was made up. He had always had his own way. He must have had a certain terrible enjoyment in depriving himself of the one thing he wanted most in the world—the one thing he wanted more than he had ever wanted anything.

He decided that Destiny—a ponderous, slow-moving creature at best—needed a little prodding from him. His plans were simple, as all effective plans are.

Mizzi had been in America just a year and a half. Her development was amazing, but she was far from being the finished product that she became in later years. Hahn decided to chance it. Mizzi had no fear of audiences. He had tried her out on that. An audience stimulated her. She took it to her breast. She romped with it.

He found a play at last. A comedy, with music. It was frankly built for Mizzi. He called Wallie Ascher into his office.

"I wouldn't try her out here for a million. New York's too fly. Some little thing might be wrong—you know how they are. And all the rest would go for nothing. The kindest audience in the world—when they like you. And the cruellest in the world when they don't. We'll go on the road for two weeks. Then we'll open at the Blackstone in Chicago. I think this girl has got more real genius than any woman since—since Bernhardt in her prime. Five years from now she won't be singing. She'll be acting. And it'll *be* acting."

"Aren't you forcing things just a little?" asked Wallie, coolly.

"Oh, no. No. Anyway, it's just a try-out. By the way, Wallie, I'll probably be gone almost a month. If things go pretty well in Chicago I'll run over to French Lick for eight or ten days and see if I can't get a little of this stiffness out of my old bones. Will you do something for me?"

"Sure."

"Pack a few clothes, and go up to my place and live there, will you? The Jap stays on, anyway. The last time I left it alone things went wrong. You'll be doing me a favor. Take it and play the piano, and have your friends in, and boss the Jap around. He's stuck on you, anyway. Says he likes to hear you play."

He stayed away six weeks. And any one who knows him knows what hardship that was. He loved New York, and his own place, and his comfort, and his books; and hotel food gave him hideous indigestion.

Mizzi's first appearance was a moderate success. It was nothing like the sensation of her later efforts. She wasn't ready, and Hahn knew it. Mizzi and her middle-aged woman companion were installed at the Blackstone Hotel, which is just next door to the Blackstone Theatre, as any one is aware who knows Chicago. She was advertised as the Polish comedienne Mizzi Markis, and the announcements hinted at her royal though remote ancestry. And on the night the play opened, as Mizzi stepped from the entrance of her hotel on her way to the stage door just forty or fifty feet away, there she saw stretched on the pavement a scarlet path of soft-grained carpet for her feet to tread. From the steps of the hotel to the stage door of the theatre, there it lay, a rosy line of splendor.

The newspaper played it up as a publicity stunt. Every night, while the play lasted, the carpet was there. It was rolled up when the stage door closed upon her. It was unrolled and spread again when she came out after the performance. Hahn never forgot her face when she first saw it and realized its significance. The look was there on the second night, and on the third, but after that it faded, vanished, and never came again. Mizzi had tasted of the golden fruit and found it dry and profitless, without nourishment or sweetness.

The show closed in the midst of a moderate success. It closed abruptly, without warning. Together they came back to New York. Just outside New York Hahn knocked at the door of Mizzi's drawing room and stuck his round ugly face in at the opening.

"Let's surprise Wallie," he said.

"Yes," said Mizzi, listlessly.

"He doesn't know the show's closed. We'll take a chance on his being home for dinner. Unless you're too tired."

"I'm not tired."

The Jap admitted them, and Hahn cut off his staccato exclamations with a quick and smothering hand. They tiptoed into the big, gracious, lamp-lighted room.

Wallie was seated at the piano. He had on a silk dressing-gown with a purple cord. One of those dressing-gowns you see in the haberdashers' windows, and wonder who buys them. He looked very tall in it, and rather distinguished and a little Favershammy, but not quite happy. He was playing as they came in. They said, "Boo!" or something idiotic like that. He stood up. And his face!

"Why, hello!" he said, and came forward, swiftly, "Hello! Hello!"

"Hello!" Hahn answered. "Not to say hello-hello." Wallie looked at the girl. "Hello, Mizzi."

"Hello," said Mizzi.

"For God's sake, stop saying hello!" roared Hahn.

They both looked at him absently, and then at each other again.

Hahn flung his coat and hat at the Jap and rubbed his palms briskly together.

"Well, how did you like it?" he said, and slapped Wallie on the back. "How'd you like it—the place I mean, and the Jap boy and all? H'm?"

"Very much," Wallie answered, formally. "Very nice."

"You'll be having one of your own some day soon. That's sure."

"I suppose so," said Wallie, indifferently.

"I would like to go home," said Mizzi, suddenly, in her precise English.

At that Wallie leaped out of his lounging coat. "I'll take you! I'll—I'll be glad to take you."

Hahn smiled a little, ruefully. "We were going to have dinner here, the three of us. But if you're tired, Mizzi,

I'm not so chipper myself, when it comes to that." He looked about the room, gratefully. "It's good to be home."

Wallie, hat in hand, was waiting in the doorway. Mizzi, turning to go, suddenly felt two hands on her shoulders. She was whirled around. Hahn—he had to stand on tiptoe to do it—kissed her once on the mouth, hard. Then he gave her a little shove toward the door. "Tell Wallie about the red carpet," he said.

"I will not," Mizzi replied, very distinctly. "I hate red carpets."

Then they were gone. Hahn hardly seemed to notice that they had left. There were, I suppose, the proper number of good-byes, and see you to-morrows, and thank-yous.

Sid Hahn stood there a moment in the middle of the room, very small, very squat, rather gnomelike, but not at all funny. He went over to the piano and seated himself, his shoulders hunched, his short legs clearing the floor. With the forefinger of his right hand he began to pick out a little tune. Not a sad little tune. A Hungarian street song. He did it atrociously. The stubby forefinger came down painstakingly on the white keys. Suddenly the little Jap servant stood in the doorway. Hahn looked up. His cheeks were wet with tears.

"God! I wish I could play!" he said.

Metropolitan Magazine

"CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN"

BY

BOOTH TARKINGTON

"CLOTHES MAKE THE MAN" ¹

By BOOTH TARKINGTON

MR. AND MRS. BAXTER, having walked a hot half mile from church, drooped thankfully into wicker chairs upon their front porch, though their ten-year-old daughter, Jane, who had accompanied them, immediately darted away, swinging her hat by its ribbon and skipping as lithesomely as if she had just come forth upon a cool morning.

"I don't know how she does it!" her father moaned, glancing after her and drying his forehead temporarily upon a handkerchief. "That would merely kill me dead, after walking in this heat."

Then, for a time, the two were content to sit in silence, nodding to occasional acquaintances who passed in the desultory after-church procession. Mr. Baxter fanned himself with sporadic little bursts of energy which made his straw hat creak, and Mrs. Baxter sighed with the heat, and gently rocked her chair.

But, as a group of five young people passed along the other side of the street, Mr. Baxter abruptly stopped fanning himself, and, following the direction of his gaze, Mrs. Baxter ceased to rock. In half-completed attitudes they leaned slightly forward, sharing one of those pauses of parents who unexpectedly behold their offspring.

The offspring, in this case, was their son, William.

"My soul!" said William's father. "Hasn't that girl gone home yet?"

"He looks pale to me," Mrs. Baxter murmured absently. "I don't think he seems at all well, lately."

During the seventeen years since the arrival of William, their first born, Mr. Baxter had gradually learned not to

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protest anxieties of this kind, unless he desired to argue with no prospect of ever getting a decision.

"Hasn't she got any *home*?" he demanded testily. "Isn't she ever going to quit visiting the Parchers and let people have a little peace?"

Mrs. Baxter disregarded this outburst as he had disregarded her remark about William's pallor. "You mean Miss Pratt?" she inquired dreamily, her eyes following the progress of her son. "No, he really doesn't look well at all."

"Is she going to visit the Parchers all summer?" Mr. Baxter insisted.

"She already has, almost," said Mrs. Baxter.

"Look at that boy!" the father grumbled. "Mooning along with those other moon-calves—can't even let her go to church alone! I wonder how many weeks of time, counting it out in hours, he's wasted that way this summer?"

"Oh, I don't know! You see, he never goes there in the evening now."

"What of that? He's there all day, isn't he? What do they find to talk about? That's the mystery to me! Day after day, hours after hours— My soul! What do they *say*?"

Mrs. Baxter laughed indulgently. "People are always wondering that about the other ages. Poor Willie! I think that a great deal of the time their conversation would be probably about as general as it is now. You see Willie and Joe Bullitt are walking one on each side of Miss Pratt, and Johnnie Watson has to walk behind with May Parcher. Joe and Johnnie are there about as much as Willie is, and of course it's often his turn to be nice to May Parcher. He hasn't many chances to be tête-à-tête with Miss Pratt."

"Well, she ought to go home. I want that boy to get back into his senses. He's awful!"

"I think she is going soon," said Mrs. Baxter. "The Parchers are to have a dance for her Friday night, and I understand there's a floor to be laid in the yard and great things. It's a farewell party."

"That's one mercy, anyhow!"

"And if you wonder what they say," she resumed, "why, probably they're all talking about the party. And when Willie is alone with her—well, what does anybody say?" Mrs. Baxter interrupted herself to laugh. "Jane, for instance—she's always fascinated by that darkey, Genesis, when he's at work here in the yard, and they have long, long talks; I've seen them from the window. What on earth do you suppose they talk about? That's where Jane is now. She knew I told Genesis I'd give him something if he'd come and freeze the ice-cream for us to-day, and when we got here she heard the freezer and hopped right around there. If you went out to the back porch you'd find them talking steadily—but what on earth about I couldn't guess to save my life!"

And yet nothing could have been simpler: as a matter of fact, Jane and Genesis were talking about society. That is to say, their discourse was not sociologic; rather it was of the frivolous and elegant. Watteau prevailed with them over John Stuart Mill—in a word, they spoke of the beau monde.

Genesis turned the handle of the freezer with his left hand, allowing his right the freedom of gesture which was an intermittent necessity when he talked. In the matter of dress, Genesis had always been among the most informal of his race, but to-day there was a change almost unnerving to the Caucasian eye. He wore a balloonish suit of purple, strangely scalloped at pocket and cuff, and more strangely decorated with lines of small parasite buttons, in color blue, obviously buttons of leisure. His bulbous new shoes flashed back yellow fire at the embarrassed sun, and his collar (for he had gone so far) sent forth other sparkles, playing upon a polished surface over an inner graining of soot. Beneath it hung a simple, white, soiled evening tie, draped in a manner unintended by its manufacturer, and heavily overburdened by a green glass medallion of the Emperor Tiberius, set in brass.

"Yes'm," said Genesis. "Now I'm in 'at Swim—flyin' roun' ev'y even' wif all lem blue-vein people—I say, 'Mus' go buy me some blue-vein clo'es! Ef I'm go'n

a *start*, might's well start *high*!" So firs', I buy me thishere gol' necktie pin wi' thishere lady's face carved out o' green di'mon, sittin' in the middle all 'at gol'. 'Nen I buy me pair Royal King shoes. I got a frien' o' mine, thishere Blooie Bowers; he say Royal King shoes same kiheo' shoes *he* wear, an' I walk straight in 'at sto' where they keep 'em at. 'Don' was'e my time showin' me no ole-time shoes,' I say. 'Run out some them big, yella, lump-toed Royal Kings befo' my eyes, an' firs' pair fit me I pay price, an' wear em' right off on me!' 'Nen I got me thishere suit o' clo'es—*oh, oh!* Sign on 'em in window: 'Ef you wish to be bes'-dress' man in town take me home fer six dolluhs ninety-sevum cents.' 'At's kine o' suit Genesis need,' I say. 'Ef Genesis go'n a start dressin' high, might's well start top!'"

Jane nodded gravely, comprehending the reasonableness of this view. "What made you decide to start, Genesis?" she asked earnestly. "I mean, how did it happen you began to get this way?"

"Well, suh, 't all come 'bout right like kine o' slidin' into it 'stid o' hoppin' an' jumpin'. I'z spen' the even' at 'at lady's house, Fanny, what cook nex' do', las' year. Well, suh, 'at lady Fanny, she quit privut cookin', she kaytliss—"

"She's what?" Jane asked. "What's that mean, Genesis—kaytliss?"

"She kaytuhs," he exclaimed. "Ef it's a man you call him kaytuh; ef it's a lady she's a kaytliss. She does kaytun fer all lem blue-vein fam'lies in town. She make re-feshmuns, bring waituhs—'at's kaytun. You maw give big dinnuh, she have Fanny kaytuh, an' don't take no trouble 'tall herself. Fanny take all 'at trouble."

"I see," said Jane. "But I don't see how her bein' a kaytliss started you to dressin' so high, Genesis."

"Thishere way. Fanny say, 'Look here, Genesis, I got big job t'morra night an' I'm man short, 'count o' havin' to have a 'nouncer.'"

"A what?"

"Fanny talk jes' that way. Goin' be big dinnuh potty, an' thishere blue-vein fam'ly tell Fanny they want

whole lot of extry sploogin'; tell her put fine lookin cullud man stan' by drawin'-room do'—ask ev'ybody name an' holler out whatever name they say, jes' as they walk in. Thishere fam'ly say they goin' show what's what, 'nis town, an' they boun' Fanny go git 'em a 'nouncer. 'Well, what's mattuh you doin' 'at 'nouncin'?' Fanny say. 'Who—me?' I tell her. 'Yes, you kin too!' she say, an' she say len' me 'at waituh suit yoosta b'long ole Henry Gimlet what die' when he owin' Fanny sixteen dolluhs—an' Fanny tuck an' keep 'at waituh suit. She use 'at suit on extry waituhs when she got some on her hands what ain' got no waituh suit. 'You wear 'at suit,' Fanny say, 'an' you be good 'nouncer, 'cause you' a fine, big man, an' got a big gran' voice; nen you learn befo' long be a waituh, Genesis, 'an git dolluh an' half ev'y even' you waitin', 'sides all 'at money you make cuttin' grass daytime.' Well, suh, I'z stan' up doin' 'at 'nouncin' ve'y nex' night. White lady an' ge'lmun walk todes my do', I step up to 'em—I step up to 'em thisaway." Here Genesis found it pleasant to present the scene with some elaboration. He dropped the handle of the freezer, rose, assumed a stately but ingratiating expression and "stepped up" to the imagined couple, using a pacing and rhythmic gait—a conservative prance, which plainly indicated the simultaneous operation of an orchestra. Then bending graciously, as though the persons addressed were of dwarfish stature, "'Scuse me," he said, "but kin I please be so p'lite as to 'quiah you' name?" For a moment he listened attentively, then nodded, and, returning with the same aristocratic undulations to an imaginary doorway near the freezer, "Misto an' Missuz Orlosko Rinktum!" he proclaimed sonorously.

"Who?" cried Jane, fascinated. "Genesis, 'nounce that again, right away!"

Genesis heartily complied.

"Misto an' Missuz Orlosko Rinktum!" he bawled.

"Was that really their names?" she asked eagerly.

"Well, I kine o' fergit," Genesis admitted, resuming his work with the freezer. "Seem like I rickalect some-

body got name good deal like what I say, 'cause some mighty blue-vein names at 'at dinnuh-potty, yes-suh! But I on'y git to be 'nouncer one time, 'cause Fanny tellin' me nex' fam'ly have dinnuh-potty make heap o' fun. Say I done my 'nouncin' good as kin be, but say what's use holler'n names jes' fer some the neighbors or they own aunts an' uncles to walk in, when ev'rybody awready knows 'em? So Fanny pummote me to waituh, an' I roun' right in amongs' big doin's mos' ev'y night. Pass ice-cream, lemonade, lemon-ice, cake, sammitches. 'Lemme han' you lil mo' chicken-salad, ma'am'—'Low me be so kine as to git you f'esh cup coffee, suh'—'s way ole Genesis talkin' ev'y even' 'ese days!"

Jane looked at him thoughtfully. "Do you like it better than cuttin' grass, Genesis?" she asked.

He paused to consider.

"Yes'm—when ban' play all lem *tunes*! My goo'ness, do soun' gran'!"

"You can't do it to-night, though, Genesis," said Jane.

"You haf to be quiet on Sunday nights, don't you?"

"Yes'm. Ain' got no mo' kaytun till nex' Friday even'."

"Oh, I bet that's the party for Miss Pratt at Mr. Parcher's!" cried Jane. "Didn't I guess right?"

"Yes'm. I reckon I'm a go'n a see one you' fam'ly 'at night; see him dancin'—wait on him at refreshmuns."

Jane's expression became even more serious than usual.

"Willie? I don't know whether he's goin', Genesis."

"Lan' name!" Genesis exclaimed. "He die ef he don' git *invite* to 'at ball!"

"Oh, he's invited," said Jane. "Only I think maybe he won't go."

"My goo'ness! Why ain't he goin'?"

Jane looked at her friend studiously before replying. "Well, it's a secret," she said, finally, "but it's a very inter'sting one, an' I'll tell you if you never tell."

"Yes'm; I ain't tellin' nobody."

Jane glanced round, then stepped a little closer and told the secret with the solemnity it deserved. "Well, when Miss Pratt first came to visit Miss May Parcher, Willie used to keep papa's evening clo'es in his window-

seat, an' mamma wondered what *had* become of 'em. Then, after dinner, he'd slip up there an' put 'em on him, an' go out through the kitchen an' call on Miss Pratt. Then mamma found 'em, and she thought he oughtn't to do that, so she didn't tell him or anything, an' she didn't even tell papa, but she had the tailor make 'em ever an' ever so much bigger, 'cause they were gettin' too tight for papa. An', well, so after that, even if Willie could get 'em out o' mamma's clo'es closet where she keeps 'em now, he'd look so funny in 'em he couldn't wear 'em. Well, an' then he's never been to see Miss Pratt in the evening one single time since then because mamma says after he started to go there in that suit he couldn't go without it, or maybe Miss Pratt or the other ones that's in love of her would think it was pretty queer, and maybe kind of expeck it was papa's all the time. Mamma says she thinks Willie must have worried a good deal over reasons to say why he'd always go in the daytime after that, an' never came in the evening, an' now they're goin' to have this party, an' she says he's been gettin' paler an' paler every day since he heard about it. Mamma says he's pale *some*, because Miss Pratt's goin' away, but she thinks it's a good deal more because, well, if he would wear those evening clo'es just to go callin', how would it be to go to that party an' not have any? That's what mamma thinks—an', Genesis, you promised you'd never tell as long as you lived!"

"Yes'm. I ain' tellin'," Genesis chuckled. "I'm a go'n a git me one nem waituh suits befo' long, myse'f, so's I kin quit wearin' 'at ole Henry Gimlet suit what b'longs to Fanny, an' have me a privut suit o' my own. They's a secon' han' sto', ovuh on the avynoo, where they got swaller-tail suits all way f'um sevum dolluhs to nineteen dolluhs an' ninety-eight cents. I'm a—"

Jane started, interrupting him. "*Sh,*" she whispered, laying a finger warningly upon her lips. William had entered the yard at the back gate, and, approaching over the lawn, had arrived at the steps of the porch before Jane perceived him. She gave him an apprehensive look, but he passed into the house absent-mindedly, not

even glancing at Clematis, the humble and faithful dog in attendance upon Genesis—and that was remarkable, because the sight of Clematis was nearly always but too obviously painful to William. Clematis was so mingled a dog that he shook one's faith in any definiteness of design on the part of Nature: it hurt William to see him about the premises, and William showed his feelings, for he feared that people might think Clematis belonged to him or to his family. But to-day he passed without flinching—and Mrs. Baxter was right: William did look pale.

"I guess he didn't hear us," said Jane, when he had disappeared into the interior. "He acks awful funny!" she added thoughtfully. "First when he was in love with Miss Pratt, he'd be mad about somep'm' almost every minute he was home. Couldn't anybody say *anything* to him but he'd just behave as if it was awful, an' then if you'd see him out walkin' with Miss Pratt, well, he'd look like—like—" Jane paused; her eye fell upon Clematis and by a happy inspiration she was able to complete her simile with remarkable accuracy. "He'd look like the way Clematis 'looks at people! That's just *exactly* the way he'd look, Genesis, when he was walkin' with Miss Pratt; an' then when he was home he got so quiet he couldn't answer questions an' wouldn't hear what anybody said to him at table or anywhere, an' papa'd just almost bust. Mamma 'n' papa'd talk an' talk about it, an'"—she lowered her voice—"an' I an' sometimes he'd sit in there without any light, or he'd hardly ever get mad any more; he'd just sit in his room, an' sometimes he'd sit in there without any light, or he'd sit out in the yard all by himself all evening maybe, an' th' other evening after I was in bed I heard 'em, an' papa said—well, this is what papa told mamma." And again lowering her voice, she proffered the quotation from her father in a tone somewhat awestruck. "Papa said, by Gosh! if he ever 'a' thought a son of his could make such a Word idiot of himself he almost wished we'd both been girls!"

Having completed this report in a violent whisper Jane

nodded repeatedly, for emphasis, and Genesis shook his head to show that he was as deeply impressed as she wished him to be. "I guess," she added, after a pause, "I guess Willie didn't hear anything we talked about him, or clo'es, or anything."

She was mistaken in part. William had caught no reference to himself, but he had overheard something, and he was now alone in his room, thinking about it almost feverishly. "A secon' han' sto', ovuh on the avynoo, where they got swaller-tail suits all way frum sevem dolluhs to nineteen dolluhs an' ninety-eight cents."

. . . Civilization is responsible for certain longings in the breast of man—artificial longings, but sometimes as poignant as hunger and thirst. Of these the strongest are those of the maid for the bridal veil, of the lad for long trousers, and of the youth for a tailed coat of state. To the gratification of this last, few of the more hushed joys in life are comparable. Indulged youths, too rich, can know, to the unctuous full, neither the longing nor the gratification; but one such as William, in "moderate circumstances," is privileged to pant for his first evening clothes as the hart panteth after the water-brook—and sometimes, to pant in vain. Also, this was a crisis in William's life: in addition to his yearning for such apparel, he was racked by a passionate urgency.

As Jane had so precociously understood, unless he should somehow manage to obtain the proper draperies he could not go to the farewell dance for Miss Pratt. Other unequipped boys could go in their ordinary "best clothes," but William could not; for, alack! he had dressed too well too soon!

He was in desperate case. The sorrow of the approaching great departure was but the heavier because it had been so long deferred. To William it had seemed that this flower-strewn summer could actually end no more than he could actually die, but Time had begun its awful lecture, and even Seventeen was listening. Miss Pratt, that magic girl, was going home.

To the competent twenties, hundreds of miles sug-

gesting no impossibilities, such departures may be rending but not tragic. Implacable, the difference to Seventeen! Miss Pratt was going home, and Seventeen could not follow; it could only mourn upon the lonely shore, tracing little angelic footprints left in the sand. To Seventeen such a departure is final; it is a vanishing.

And now it seemed possible that William might be deprived even of the last romantic consolations: of the "last waltz together," of the last, last "listening to music in the moonlight together"; of all those sacred lasts of the "last evening together." And this was a thought that turned him cold on the hot day: it was unbearable.

He had pleaded strongly for a "dress-suit" as a fitting recognition of his seventeenth birthday anniversary, but he had been denied by his father with a jocularly more crushing than rigor. Since then—in particular since the arrival of Miss Pratt—Mr. Baxter's temper had been growing steadily more and more even. That is, as affected by William's social activities, it was uniformly bad. Nevertheless, after heavy brooding, William decided to make one final appeal before he resorted to measures which the necessities of despair had brought to his mind.

He wished to give himself every chance for a good effect; therefore he did not act hastily, but went over what he intended to say, rehearsing it with a few appropriate gestures, and even taking some pleasure in the pathetic dignity of this performance, as revealed by occasional glances at the mirror of his dressing-table. But in spite of these little alleviations, his trouble was great and all too real, for, unhappily, the previous rehearsal of an emotional scene does not prove the emotion insincere.

Descending, he found his father and mother still sitting upon the front porch. Then, standing before them, solemn-eyed, he uttered a preluding cough, and began: "Father," he said, in a loud voice, "I have come to—"

"Dear me!" Mrs. Baxter exclaimed, not perceiving that she was interrupting an intended oration. "Willie, you *do* look pale! Sit down, poor child; you oughtn't to walk so much in this heat."

"Father," William repeated. "Fath—"

"I suppose you got her safely home from church," Mr. Baxter said. "She might have been carried off by highwaymen if you three boys hadn't been along to take care of her!"

But William persisted heroically. "Father—" he said. "Father, I have come to—"

"What on earth's the matter with you?" Mr. Baxter ceased to fan himself, Mrs. Baxter stopped rocking, and both stared, for it had dawned upon them that something unusual was beginning to take place.

William backed to the start and tried it again. "Father, I have come to—" He paused and gulped, evidently expecting to be interrupted, but both of his parents remained silent, regarding him with puzzled surprise. "Father," he began once more, "I have come—I have come to—to place before you something I think it's your duty as my father to undertake, and I have thought over this step before laying it before you."

"My soul!" said Mr. Baxter under his breath. "My soul!"

"At my age," William continued, swallowing, and fixing his earnest eyes upon the roof of the porch to avoid the disconcerting stare of his father, "at my age there's some things that ought to be done and some things that ought not to be done. If you asked me what I thought *ought* to be done, there is only one answer: When anybody as old as I am has to go out among other young men his own age that already got one, like anyway half of them *have*, who I go with, and their fathers have already taken such a step, because they felt it was the only right thing to do, because at my age and the young men I go with's age it is the only right thing to do because that is something nobody could deny, at my age—" Here William drew a long breath, and, deciding to abandon that sentence as irrevocably tangled, began another: "I have thought over this step, because there comes a time to every young man when they must lay a step before their father before something happens that they would be sorry for. I have thought this undertaking over, and I am certain it would be your honest duty—"

"My soul!" gasped Mr. Baxter. "I thought I knew you pretty well, but you talk like a stranger to me! What is all this? What you *want*?"

"A dress-suit!" said William. He had intended to say a great deal more before coming to the point, but though through nervousness he had lost some threads of his rehearsed plea, it seemed to him he was getting along well, and putting his case with some distinction and power. He was surprised and hurt, therefore, to hear his father utter a wordless shout in a tone of wondering derision.

"I have more to say—" William began.

But, disregarding this, Mr. Baxter cut him off. "A dress-suit!" he cried. "Well, I'm glad you were talking about *something*, because I honestly thought it must be too much sun!"

At this, the troubled William brought his eyes down from the porch roof and forgot his rehearsal. He lifted his hand appealingly. "Father," he said, "I *got* to have one!"

"Got to!" Mr. Baxter laughed a laugh that chilled the suppliant through and through. "At your age I thought I was lucky if I had *any* suit that was fit to be seen in. You're too young, Willie. I don't want you to get your mind on such stuff, and if I have my way, you won't have a dress-suit for four years more, anyhow."

"Father, I *got* to have one. I got to have one right away!" The urgency in William's voice was almost tearful. "I don't ask you to have it made, or to go to expensive tailors, but there's a plenty of good ready-made ones that only cost about forty dollars; they're advertised in the paper. Father, wouldn't you spent just forty dollars? I'll pay it back when I'm in business. I'll work—"

Mr. Baxter waved all this aside. "It's not the money. It's the principle that I'm standing for, and I don't intend—"

"Father, *won't* you do it?"

"No, I will not!"

William saw that sentence had been passed and all appeals for a new trial denied. He choked, and rushed into the house without more ado.

"Poor boy!" his mother said.

"Poor boy nothing!" fumed Mr. Baxter. "He's almost lost his mind over that Miss Pratt. Think of his coming out here and starting a regular debating society declamation before his mother and father! Why, I never heard anything like it in my life! I don't like to hurt his feelings, and I'd give him anything I could afford that would do him any good, but all he wants it for now is to splurge around in at this party before that little yellow-haired girl! I guess he can wear the kind of clothes most of the other boys wear—the kind *I* wore at parties—and never thought of wearing anything else. What's the world getting to be like? Seventeen years old and throws a fit because he can't have a dress-suit!"

Mrs. Baxter looked thoughtful. "But—but suppose he felt he couldn't go to the dance unless he wore one, poor boy—"

"All the better," said Mr. Baxter firmly. "Do him good to keep away and get his mind on something else."

"Of course," she suggested, with some timidity, "forty dollars isn't a great deal of money, and a ready-made suit, just to begin with—"

Naturally Mr. Baxter perceived whither she was drifting. "Forty dollars isn't a thousand," he interrupted, "but what you want to throw it away for? One reason a boy of seventeen oughtn't to have evening clothes is the way he behaves with *any* clothes. Forty dollars! Why, only this summer he sat down on Jane's open paint-box, twice in one week!"

"Well—Miss Pratt is going away, and the dance will be her last night. I'm afraid it would really hurt him to miss it. I remember once, before we were engaged—that evening before papa took me abroad, and you—"

"It's no use, mamma," he said. "We were both over twenty—why, *I* was six years older than Willie, even then. There's no comparison at all. I'll let him order a dress-suit on his twenty-first birthday and not a minute before. I don't believe in it, and I intend to see that he gets all this stuff out of his system. He's got to learn some hard sense!"

Mrs. Baxter shook her head doubtfully, but she said no more. Perhaps she regretted a little that she had caused Mr. Baxter's evening clothes to be so expansively enlarged—for she looked rather regretful. She also looked rather incomprehensible, not to say cryptic, during the long silence which followed, and Mr. Baxter resumed his rocking, unaware of the fixity of gaze which his wife maintained upon him—a thing the most loyal will do sometimes. The incomprehensible look disappeared before long, but the regretful one was renewed in the mother's eyes whenever she caught glimpses of her son, that day, and at the table, where William's manner was gentle—even toward his heartless father.

Underneath that gentleness, the harried self of William was no longer debating a desperate resolve, but had fixed upon it, and on the following afternoon Jane chanced to be a witness of some resultant actions. She came to her mother with an account of them.

"Mamma, what you s'pose Willie wants of those two ole market baskets that were down cellar?"

"Why, Jane?"

"Well, he carried 'em in his room, an' then he saw me lookin', an' he said 'G'way from here!' an' shut the door. He looks so funny! What's he want of those ole baskets, mamma?"

"I don't know. Perhaps he doesn't even know himself, Jane."

But William did know, definitely. He had set the baskets upon chairs, and now, with pale determination, he was proceeding to fill them. When his task was completed the two baskets contained, between them:

One heavy-weight winter suit of clothes.

One light-weight summer suit of clothes.

Two pairs of white flannel trousers.

Two Madras negligée shirts.

Two flannel shirts.

Two silk shirts.

Seven soft collars.

Three silk neckties.

One crocheted tie.

Eight pairs of socks.

One pair of patent-leather shoes.

One overcoat.

Some underwear.

One two-foot shelf of books, consisting of several sterling works upon mathematics, in a damaged condition; five of Shakespeare's plays, expurgated and edited for schools and colleges, and also damaged; a work upon political economy and another upon the science of physics; "Webster's Collegiate Dictionary," "How to Enter a Drawing-Room and 500 Other Hints," "Witty Sayings From Here and There," "Lorna Doone," "Quentin Durward," "The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes," a very old copy of "Moths," and a small Bible.

William spread handkerchiefs upon the two overbulging cargoes, that their nature might not be disclosed to the curious, and, after listening a moment at his door, took the baskets, one upon each arm, then went quickly down the stairs and out of the house, out of the yard, and into the alley—by which route he had modestly chosen to travel.

. . . After an absence of about two hours, he returned empty-handed and anxious. "Mother, I want to speak to you," he said, addressing Mrs. Baxter in a voice which clearly proved the strain of these racking days. "I want to speak to you about something important."

"Yes, Willie?"

"Please send Jane away. I can't talk about important things with a child in the room."

Jane naturally wished to stay, since he was going to say something important. "Mamma, do I *haf* to go?"

"Just a few minutes, dear."

Jane walked submissively out of the door, leaving it open behind her. Then, having gone about six feet farther, she halted, and, preserving a breathless silence, consoled herself for her banishment by listening to what was said, hearing it all as satisfactorily as if she had remained in the room. Quiet, thoughtful children, like Jane, avail themselves of these little pleasures oftener than is suspected.

"Mother," said William, with great intensity, "I want to ask you please to lend me three dollars and sixty cents."

"What for, Willie?"

"Mother, I just ask you to lend me three dollars and sixty cents."

"But what *for*?"

"Mother, I don't feel I can discuss it any; I simply ask you: Will you lend me three dollars and sixty cents?"

Mrs. Baxter laughed gently. "I don't think I could, Willie, but certainly I should want to know what for."

"Mother, I am going on eighteen years of age, and when I ask for a small sum of money, like three dollars and sixty cents, I think I might be trusted to know how to use it for my own good without having to answer questions like a ch—"

"Why, Willie!" she exclaimed. "You ought to have plenty of money of your own."

"Of course I ought," he agreed warmly. "If you'd ask father to give me a regular allow—"

"No, no; I mean you ought to have plenty left out of that old junk and furniture I let you sell, last month. You had nearly nine dollars!"

"That was five weeks ago," William explained wearily.

"But you certainly must have some of it left. Why, it was *more* than nine dollars, I believe! I think it was nearer ten. Surely you haven't—"

"Ye Gods!" cried the goaded William. "A person going on eighteen years old ought to be able to spend nine dollars in five weeks without everybody's acting like it was a crime! Mother, I ask you the simple question: Will you *please* lend me three dollars and sixty cents?"

"I don't think I ought to, dear. I'm sure your father wouldn't wish me to, unless you'll tell me what you want it for. In fact, I won't consider it at all unless you do tell me."

"You won't do it?" he quavered.

She shook her head gently. "You see, dear, I'm afraid the reason you don't tell me is because you know that I wouldn't give it to you if I knew what you wanted it for."

And this perfect diagnosis of the case so disheartened him that after a few monosyllabic efforts to continue the

conversation with dignity, he gave it up, and left in such a preoccupation with despondency that he passed the surprised Jane, in the hall, without suspecting what she had been doing.

That evening, after dinner, he made to his father an impassioned appeal for three dollars and sixty cents, laying such stress of pathos on his principal argument that if he couldn't have a dress-suit, at least he ought to be given three dollars and sixty *cents* (the emphasis is William's), that Mr. Baxter was moved in the direction of consent—but not far enough. "I'd like to let you have it, Willie," he said, excusing himself for refusal, "but your mother felt *she* oughtn't to do it, unless you'd say what you wanted it for, and I'm sure she wouldn't like me to do it. I can't let you have it unless you get her to say she wants me to."

Thus advised, the unfortunate made another appeal to his mother the next day, and having brought about no relaxation of the situation, again petitioned his father, on the following evening. So it went, the torn and driven William turning from parent to parent; and surely, since the world began, the special sum of three dollars and sixty cents has never been so often mentioned in any one house and in the same space of time as it was in the house of the Baxters during Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday of that oppressive week. But on Friday William disappeared after breakfast and did not return to lunch.

Mrs. Baxter was troubled. During the afternoon she glanced often from the open window of the room where she had gone to sew, but the peaceful neighborhood continued to be peaceful, and no sound of the harassed footsteps of William echoed from the pavement. However, she saw Genesis arrive (in his week-day costume) to do some weeding, and Jane immediately skip forth for mingled purposes of observation and conversation.

"What *do* they say?" thought Mrs. Baxter, observing that both Jane and Genesis were unusually animated. But for once that perplexity was to be dispersed. After an exciting half-hour Jane came flying to her mother, breathless.

"Mamma," she cried, "I know where Willie is! Genesis told me, 'cause he saw him, an' he talked to him while he was doin' it."

"Doing what? Where?"

"Mamma, listen! What you think Willie's doin'? I bet you can't g—"

"Jane!" Mrs. Baxter spoke sharply. "Tell me what Genesis said, at once."

"Yes'm. Willie's over in a lumber-yard that Genesis comes by on his way from over on the avynoo where all the colored people live—an' he's countin' knot-holes in shingles."

"He is *what*?"

"Yes'm. Genesis knows all about it, because he was thinkin' of doin' it himself, only he says it would be too slow. This is the way it is, mamma—listen, mamma, because this is just exactly the way it is. Well, this lumber-yard man got into some sort of a fuss because he bought millions an' millions of shingles, mamma, that had too many knots in, an' the man don't want to pay for 'em, or else the store where he bought 'em won't take 'em back, an' they got to prove how many shingles are bad shingles, or somep'm, and anyway, mamma, that's what Willie's doin'. Every time he comes to a bad shingle, mamma, he puts it somewheres else, or somep'm like that, mamma, an' every time he's put a thousand bad shingles in this other place, they give him six cents. He gets the six cents to keep, mamma—an' that's what he's been doin' all day!"

"Good gracious!"

"Oh, but that's nothing, mamma—just you wait till you hear the rest. *That* part of it isn't anything a *tall*, mamma! You wouldn't hardly notice that part of it, if you knew the other part of it, mamma. Why, that isn't *anything*!" Jane made demonstrations of scorn for the insignificant information already imparted.

"Jane!"

"Yes'm?"

"I want to know everything Genesis told you," said her mother, "and I want you to tell it as quickly as you can."

"Well, I *am* tellin' it, mamma!" Jane protested. "I'm

just *beginning* to tell it. I can't tell it unless there's a beginning, can I? How could there be *anything* unless you had to begin it, mamma?"

"Try your best to go on, Jane!"

"Yes'm. Well, Genesis says—Mamma!" Jane interrupted herself with a little outcry. "Oh! I bet *that's* what he had those two market baskets for! Yes, sir! That's just what he did! An' then he needed the rest o' the money and you an' papa wouldn't give him any, and so he began countin' shingles to-day 'cause to-night's the night of the party an' he just *hass* to have it!"

Mrs. Baxter, who had risen to her feet, recalled the episode of the baskets and sank into a chair. "How did Genesis know Willie wanted forty dollars, and if Willie's pawned something how did Genesis know *that*? Did Willie tell Gen—"

"Oh, no, mamma, Willie didn't want forty dollars—only fourteen!"

"But he couldn't get even the cheapest ready-made dress-suit for fourteen dollars."

"Mamma, you're gettin' it all mixed up!" Jane cried. "Listen, mamma! Genesis knows all about a second-hand store over on the avynoo; an' it keeps 'most everything, an' Genesis says it's the nicest store! It keeps waiter suits all the way up to nineteen dollars and ninety-nine cents. Well, an' Genesis wants to get one of those suits, so he goes in there all the time an' talks to the man an' bargains an' bargains with him, 'cause Genesis says this man is the bargainest man in the wide worl', mamma! That's what Genesis says. Well, an' so this man's name is One-eye Beljus, mamma. That's his name, an' Genesis says so. Well, an' so this man that Genesis told me about that keeps the store—I mean One-eye Beljus, mamma—well, One-eye Beljus had Willie's name written down in a book, an' he knew Genesis worked for fam'lies that have boys like Willie in 'em, an' this morning One-eye Beljus showed Genesis Willie's name written down in his book, an' One-eye Beljus asked Genesis if he knew anybody by that name an' all about him. Well, an' so at first Genesis pretended he was tryin' to remember, because

he wanted to find out what Willie went there for. Genesis didn't tell any stories, mamma; he just pretended he couldn't remember, an' so, well, One-eye Beljus kept talkin' an' pretty soon Genesis found out all about it. One-eye Beljus said Willie came in there and tried on the coat of one of those waiter suits—"

"Oh, no!" gasped Mrs. Baxter.

"Yes'm, an' One-eye Beljus said it was the only one that would fit Willie, an' One-eye Beljus told Willie that suit was worth fourteen dollars, an' Willie said he didn't have any money, but he'd like to trade something else for it. Well, an' so One-eye Beljus said this was an awful fine suit an' the only one he had that had b'longed to a white gentleman. Well, an' so they bargained, an' bargained, an' bargained, an' *bargained!* An' then, well, an' so at last Willie said he'd go an' get everything that b'longed to him, an' One-eye Beljus could pick out enough to make fourteen dollars' worth, an' then Willie could have the suit. Well, an' so Willie came home an' put everything he had that b'longed to him into those two baskets, mamma—that's just what he did, 'cause Genesis says he told One-eye Beljus it was everything that b'longed to him, an' that would take two baskets, mamma. Well then, an' so he told One-eye Beljus to pick out fourteen dollars' worth, an' One-eye Beljus ast Willie if he didn't have a watch. Well, Willie took out his watch, an' One-eye Beljus said it was an awful bad watch but he would put it in for a dollar; an' he said, 'I'll put your necktie pin in for forty cents more,' so Willie took it out of his necktie; an' then One-eye Beljus said it would take all the things in the baskets to make I forget how much, mamma, and the watch would be a dollar more, an' the pin forty cents, an' that would leave just three dollars and sixty cents more for Willie to pay before he could get the suit."

Mrs. Baxter's face had become suffused with high color, but she wished to know all that Genesis had said, and, mastering her feelings with an effort, she told Jane to proceed—a command obeyed after Jane had taken several long breaths.

"Well, an' so the worst part of it is, Genesis says, it's because that suit is haunted."

"What!"

"Yes'm," said Jane solemnly; "Genesis says it's haunted. Genesis says everybody over on the avynoo knows all about that suit, an' he says that's why One-eye Beljus never could sell it before. Genesis says One-eye Beljus tried to sell it to a colored man for three dollars, but the man said he wouldn't put it on for three hunderd dollars, an' Genesis says he wouldn't either, because it belonged to a Dago waiter that—that—" Jane's voice sank to a whisper of unctuous horror: she was having a wonderful time! "Mamma, this Dago waiter, he lived over on the avynoo, an' he took a case-knife he'd sharpened—*an' he cut a lady's head off with it!*"

Mrs. Baxter screamed faintly.

"An' he got hung, mamma! If you don't believe it you can ask One-eye Beljus—I guess *he* knows! An' you can ask—"

"Hush!"

"An' he sold this suit that Willie wants to One-eye Beljus when he was in jail, mamma. He sold it to him before he got hung, mamma."

"Hush, Jane!"

But Jane couldn't hush now. "An' he had that suit on when he cut the lady's head off, mamma, an' that's why it's haunted. They cleaned it all up excep' a few little spots of bl—"

"*Jane!*" shouted her mother. "You must not talk about such things, and Genesis mustn't tell you stories of that sort!"

"Well, how could he help it, if he told me about Willie?" Jane urged reasonably.

"Never mind! Did that crazy ch— Did Willie *leave* the baskets in that dreadful place?"

"Yes'm—an' his watch an' pin," Jane informed her impressively. "An' One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis knew Willie, because One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis thought Willie could get the three dollars an' sixty cents, an' One-eye Beljus wanted to know if Genesis

thought he could get anything more out of him besides that. He told Genesis he hadn't told Willie he *could* have the suit, after all; he just told him he *thought* he could, but he wouldn't say for certain till he brought him the three dollars an' sixty cents. So Willie left all his things there, an' his watch an'—"

"That will do!" Mrs. Baxter's voice was sharper than it had ever been in Jane's recollection. "I don't need to hear any more—and I don't *want* to hear any more!"

Jane was justly aggrieved. "But mamma, it isn't *my* fault!"

Mrs. Baxter's lips parted to speak, but she checked herself. "Fault?" she said gravely. "I wonder whose fault it really is!"

And with that she went hurriedly into William's room, and made a brief inspection of his clothes-closet and dressing-table. Then, as Jane watched her in awed silence, she strode to the window and called loudly:

"Genesis!"

"Yes'm?" came the voice from below.

"Go to that lumber-yard where Mr. William is at work and bring him here to me at once. If he declines to come, tell him—" Her voice broke oddly; she choked, but Jane could not decide with what emotion. "Tell him—tell him I ordered you to use force if necessary! Hurry!"

"Yes'm!"

Jane ran to the window in time to see Genesis departing seriously through the back gate.

"Mamma—"

"Don't talk to me now, Jane," Mrs. Baxter said crisply. "I want you to go down in the yard, and when Willie comes tell him I'm waiting for him here in his own room. And don't come with him, Jane. Run!"

"Yes, mamma." Jane was pleased with this appointment: she anxiously desired to be the first to see how Willie "looked."

... He looked flurried and flustered and breathless, and there were blisters upon the reddened palms of his hands. "What on earth's the matter, mother?" he asked, as he stood panting before her. "Genesis said something

was wrong, and he said you told him to hit me if I wouldn't come."

"Oh, *no!*" she cried. "I only meant I thought perhaps you wouldn't obey any ordinary message—"

"Well, well, it doesn't matter, but please hurry and say what you want to because I got to get back and—"

"No," Mrs. Baxter said quietly. "You're not going back to count any more shingles, Willie. How much have you earned?"

He swallowed, but spoke bravely. "Thirty-six cents. But I've been getting lots faster the last two hours and there's a good deal of time before six o'clock. Mother—"

"No," she said. "You're going over to that horrible place where you've left your clothes and your watch and all those other things in the two baskets, and you're going to bring them home at once."

"Mother!" he cried aghast. "Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter. You don't want your father to find out, do you? Then get those things back here as quickly as you can. They'll have to be fumigated after being in that den."

"They've never been out of the baskets," he protested hotly, "except just to be looked at. They're *my* things, mother, and I had a right to do what I needed to with 'em, didn't I?" His utterance became difficult. "You and father just *can't* understand—and you won't do anything to help me—"

"Willie, you can go to the party," she said gently. "You didn't need those frightful clothes at all."

"I do!" he cried. "I *got* to have 'em! I *can't* go in my day clothes! There's a reason you wouldn't understand why I can't. I just *can't!*"

"Yes," she said, "you can go to the party."

"I can't either! Not unless you give me three dollars and twenty-four cents, or unless I can get back to the lumber-yard and earn the rest before—"

"No!" And the warm color that had rushed over Mrs. Baxter during Jane's sensational recital returned with a vengeance. Her eyes flashed. "If you'd rather I sent a policeman for those baskets, I'll send one. I should prefer

to do it—much! And to have that rascal arrested. If you don't want me to send a policeman you can go for them yourself, but you must start within ten minutes, because if you don't I'll telephone headquarters. Ten minutes, Willie, and I mean it!"

He cried out, protesting. She would make him a thing of scorn forever and soil his honor, if she sent a policeman. Mr. Beljus was a fair and honest tradesman, he explained passionately, and had not made the approaches in this matter. Also, the garments in question, though not entirely new, nor of the highest mode, were of good material and in splendid condition. Unmistakably they were evening clothes, and such a bargain at fourteen dollars that William would guarantee to sell them for twenty after he had worn them this one evening. Mr. Beljus himself had said that he would not even think of letting them go at fourteen to anybody else, and as for the two poor baskets of worn and useless articles offered in exchange, and a bent scarfpin and a worn-out old silver watch that had belonged to great-uncle Ben—why, the ten dollars and forty cents allowed upon them was beyond all ordinary liberality; it was almost charity. There was only one place in town where evening clothes were rented, and the suspicious persons in charge had insisted that William obtain from his father a guarantee to insure the return of the garments in perfect condition. So that was hopeless. And wasn't it better, also, to wear clothes which had known only one previous occupant (as was the case with Mr. Beljus' offering) than to hire what chance hundreds had hired? Finally, there was only one thing to be considered and this was the fact that William *had* to have those clothes!

"Six minutes," said Mrs. Baxter, glancing implacably at her watch. "When it's ten I'll telephone."

And the end of it was, of course, victory for the woman—victory both moral and physical. Three-quarters of an hour later she was unburdening the contents of the two baskets and putting the things back in place, illuminating these actions with an expression of strong distaste—in spite of broken assurances that Mr. Beljus had not more than touched any of the articles offered to him for valuation.

. . . At dinner, which was unusually early that evening, Mrs. Baxter did not often glance toward her son; she kept her eyes from that white face and spent most of her time in urging upon Mr. Baxter that he should be prompt in dressing for a card-club meeting which he and she were to attend that evening. These admonitions of hers were continued so pressingly that Mr. Baxter, after protesting that there was no use in being a whole hour too early, groaningly went to dress without even reading his paper.

William had retired to his own room, where he lay upon his bed in the darkness. He heard the evening noises of the house faintly through the closed door: voices and the clatter of metal and china from the faraway kitchen, Jane's laugh in the hall, the opening and closing of the doors. Then his father seemed to be in distress about something: William heard him complaining to Mrs. Baxter; and though the words were indistinct, the tone was vigorously plaintive. Mrs. Baxter laughed and appeared to make light of his troubles, whatever they were—and presently their footsteps were audible from the stairway; the front door closed emphatically, and they were gone.

Everything was quiet now. The open window showed as a greenish oblong set in black, and William knew that in a little while—half an hour, perhaps—there would come through the stillness of that window the distant sound of violins. That was a moment he dreaded with a dread that ached. And as he lay on his dreary bed, he thought of brightly lighted rooms where other boys were dressing eagerly, faces and hair shining, hearts beating high—boys who would possess this last evening, and the “last waltz together,” the last smile and the last sigh.

It did not once enter his mind that he could go to the dance in his “best suit,” or that possibly the other young people at the party would be too busy with their own affairs to notice particularly what he wore. It was the unquestionable and granite fact, to his mind, that the whole derisive World would know the truth about his earlier appearances in his father's clothes. And that was a form of ruin not to be faced. In the protective darkness and seclusion of William's bedroom, it is possible that smarting

eyes relieved themselves by blinking rather energetically; it is even possible that there was a minute damp spot upon the pillow. Seventeen cannot always manage the little boy yet alive under all the coverings.

There came a tapping upon the door and a soft voice.

"Will-ee?"

With a sharp exclamation William swung his legs over the edge of the bed and sat up. Of all things he desired not, he desired no conversation with, or on the part of, Jane. But he had forgotten to lock his door—the handle turned, and a dim little figure marched in.

"Willie, Adelia's goin' to put me to bed."

"You g'way from here," he said huskily. "I haven't got time to talk to you. I'm busy."

"Well, you can wait a minute, can't you?" she asked reasonably. "I haf to tell you a joke on mamma."

"I don't want to hear any jokes!"

"Well, I *haf* to tell you this one 'cause she told me to! Oh!" Jane clapped her hand over her mouth and jumped up and down, offering a fantastic silhouette against the light of the open door. "Oh, oh, *oh!*"

"What's matter?"

"She said I mustn't, *mustn't* tell that she told me to tell! My goodness! I forgot that! Mamma took me off alone right after dinner, an' she told me to tell you this joke on her as soon as she an' papa had left the house, but she said, 'Above all *things*,' she said, '*don't* let Willie know I said to tell him.' That's just what she said, an' here that's the very first thing I had to go an' do!"

"Well, what of it?"

Jane quieted down. The pangs of her remorse were lost in her love of sensationalism, and her voice sank to the thrilling whisper which it was one of her greatest pleasures to use. "Did you hear what a fuss papa was makin' when he was dressin' for the card-party?"

"I don't care if—"

"He had to go in his reg'lar clo'es!" whispered Jane triumphantly. "An' this is the joke on mamma: you know that tailor that let papa's dress-suit way, way out; well, mamma thinks that tailor must think she's crazy, or

somep'm, 'cause she took papa's dress-suit to him last Monday to get it pressed for this card-party, an' she guesses he must of understood her to tell him to do lots besides just pressin' it. Anyway, he went an' altered it, an' he took it way, way in again; an' this afternoon when it came back it was even tighter'n what it was in the first place, an' papa couldn't *begin* to get into it! Well, an' so it's all pressed an' everything, an' she stopped on the way out, an' whispered to me that sh'd got so upset over the joke on her that she couldn't remember where she put it when she took it out o' papa's room after he gave up tryin' to get inside of it. An' that," cried Jane—"that's the funniest thing of all! Why, it's layin' right on her bed this very minute!"

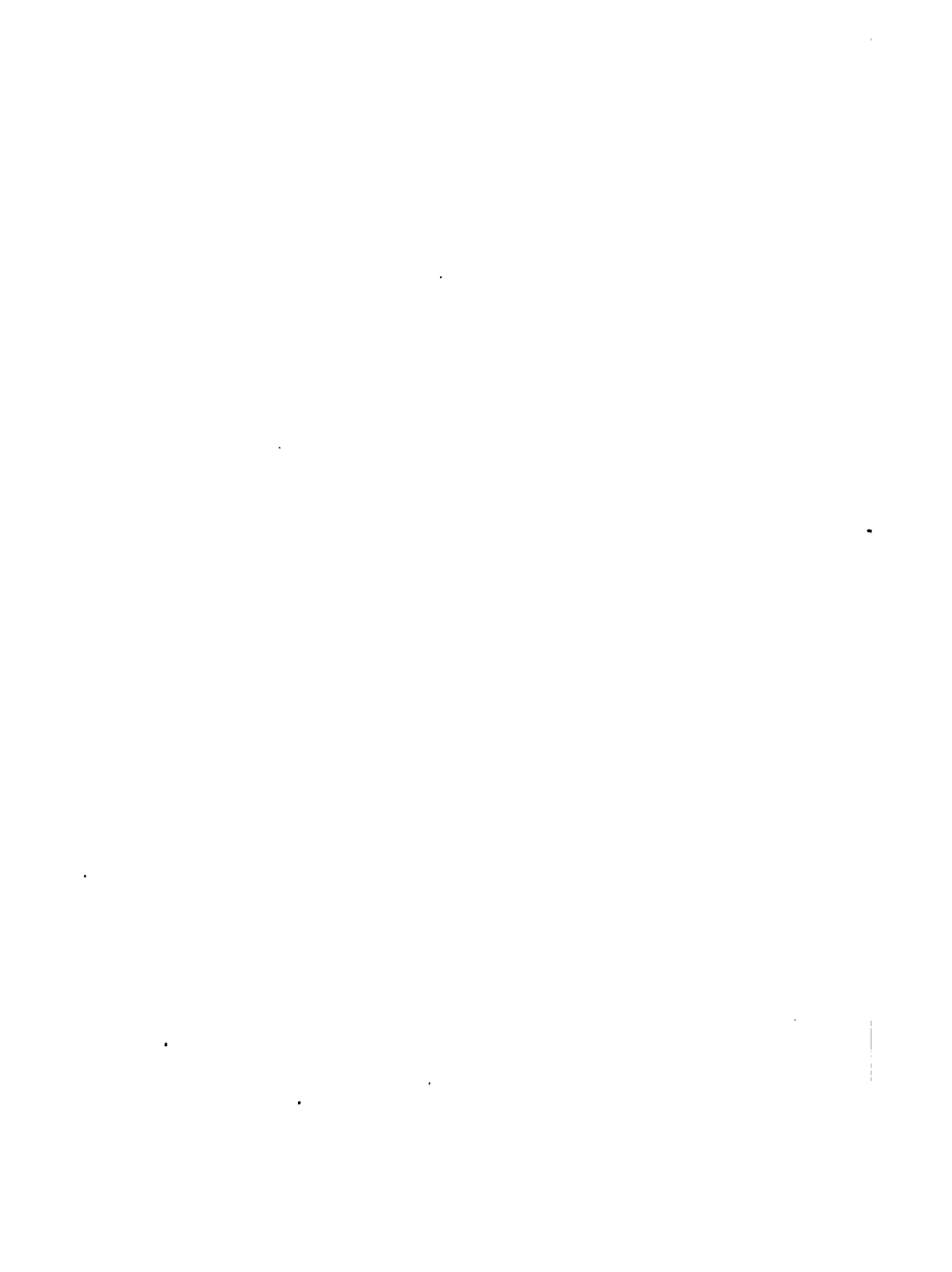
In one bound William leaped through the open door. Two seconds sufficed for his passage through the hall to his mother's bedroom—and there, neatly spread upon the lace coverlet and brighter than coronation robes, fairer than Joseph's sacred coat It lay!

The People's Home Journal

THE BELL OF SAINT GREGOIRE

BY

AGNES ROSS WHITE



THE BELL OF SAINT GREGOIRE ¹

By AGNES ROSS WHITE

NOT everywhere does the Virgin reach down to help those who pray to her as she does at St. Gregoire, but not everywhere do people pray with such simple faith, such surety, as do the *habitants* in this little parish up among the Laurentides.

For there was the never-to-be-forgotten time, when Our Lady came to help Diâne Doré, the year the bell was hung in the old church, more than a hundred years ago.

Diâne was the child of her native hills, beautiful, wild and solemn; so beautiful that the country people, not understanding, called her look strange; wild with a quiet, pagan wildness, and solemn as a seer who beholds the heart of the world. When her parents died, every home in the parish was opened to her, for that is the way of the *habitants*, but everywhere she was an alien. Only gray-haired Père Dufresne recognized the miracle of her beauty and marveled at it, or listened to her words, even though he wondered at them and was puzzled; and only Père Dufresne loved the child. So it came that she made his house her home; and there she lived her unchildlike life, roaming the hills by day, and telling the curé strange tales as they sat by the firelight after the darkness came, till the priest wondered if another Joan the Maid sat at his knee.

From the solitudes she had brought strange fancies; fantastic forms and faces had she seen in the mist on the river, a throb of divine heart-break had she caught in the moaning before the storm, or a strain of weird, unearthly music in the song of the hermit thrush, "but

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never Voices," thought the curé, "she never says she has heard Voices", and he waited, half expectant.

But Diâne grew as a child grows; and lo, there came a day when the priest looked at her, amazed, that she had grown up so soon. Then his trouble became an insistent thing. She was fifteen; there was no place for her in the village, surely none in the great world outside; there was the veil—and yes, he would speak to Monseigneur about that when next the good Bishop should come to St. Gregoire.

But before the Bishop came, St. Gregoire had been jostled by the world beyond the hills. Men from the outside came into the valley, drawing lines and measuring and placing markers here and there; the iron road was coming through St. Gregoire, perhaps.

From an eyrie on the mountain side Diâne watched the work of the strangers with curiosity. She could understand the work of the beavers and the foxes and the birds, of the wind and the rain, the frost and sunshine, even the work of the unseen things, but these strangers she could not explain.

Then one day, away up at little Lake in the Sky, she came upon one of them. He was young, very young, and never before had Diâne seen eyes the color of the sky, nor hair that shone like sunlight, for the blood of the Indian women of the past was very persistent in St. Gregoire.

To his words in English Diâne shook her head; to his halting French she answered: "I am Diâne Doré, and I live down there," pointing to the valley.

But Diâne asked no questions; she had found him in the forest on the mountain, as she had found nearly every thing of which she knew; there was nothing unusual in question. And so it was that youth, strong and virile, met youth in its virgin freshness and they walked hand in hand, unconscious and content.

But Père Dufresne was not content. "No, no, my child," said he, "you must not be with the stranger. It is not well for thee, it is not well."

"But why not, *mon père?*" asked Diâne in surprise.

"I like to be with him; I tell him many things; he knows so little of all this," with a sweep of her hand toward the hills, the river and the sky, "and he is glad to know, very glad. Why should I not be with him to tell him?"

Poor Père Dufresne stammered in embarrassment. Surely the Evil One was digging pitfalls and laying snares to entrap him, for never before had his work brought him such a problem as this, never before had one been so dear to him as Diâne, for she had touched the man-father in the priest, and it wrung his heart to say aught to change the child—"ma petite pucelle," he called her in his thoughts. Why could she not have been like all the rest to him, and why need this stranger have come to St. Gregoire—St. Gregoire so little and almost lost away back of the hills?

"He is English and perhaps a heretic," he argued, hoping thus to avoid the difficulty.

"I do not know that," she answered doubtfully. "He signs the cross as I have told him. I will ask him."

And so Père Dufresne, tender-hearted old man that he was, left the matter, hoping—as so many a wiser man has done—that *le bon Dieu* in His omnipotence would order the matter to his liking.

In good time the engineers finished their work and went on, but the boy remained, for he was not of them. He had come for the fishing, the shooting, for the primitive life he might find; he might go or stay as he chose, and the unreckoning will of youth said, "I have found that which is good in my sight; I shall stop to enjoy."

Days are to youth what years are to age, and well might Père Dufresne be dismayed at the result of his indecision. Who shall say when boyhood goes and manhood comes? Who shall say, that minute love was not, this minute it is? Certain it was that the boy listened to Diâne's half-savage, half-religious mysticism, charmed and absorbed. The old druid spirit, that had worshipped under the oak trees of Britain lived again in this son of an ancient soil, and in the reincarnation the boy became a man and loved this woman, unconsciously and naturally as the flower loves the sunlight, or the bird the freedom of the air.

But when she was not with him, when he sat by his campfire with the darkness about him, he remembered that he was from beyond the hills; he saw his lady-mother and the ivy-grown walls of home, a home which would be prison to Diâne, a home in which he knew she could never have a place. Then he saw Diâne, saw the beauty of her eyes, heard the sweetness of her voice, above all felt the purity of her spirit; and it was Diâne of whom he dreamed.

These musings by his campfire kept alive the man of convention, and he knew he must go down to the priest in the valley and claim this woman in the way decreed by man.

Summer passed and the foliage glowed and faded. Indian summer came, like a flower flung back by a band of revelers as they danced madly and merrily away; then the nights became crisp and frosty, and the day arrived when he said to Diâne as they sat watching the passing of the wild geese: "I saw the geese yesterday; I saw them the day before; to-day—to-morrow, perhaps—soon I must follow. I must leave the hills."

She turned to him quickly with a look and gesture of startled bewilderment. He leaned forward and laid his hand on hers.

"Look at me, Diâne—straight in my eyes as I talk to you. You can come with me. Think of it. Away together to see more beautiful things, away to the southward with the wild geese, till the cold is gone, then to rivers and lakes and mountains again. We shall be together all the days—always; we shall watch the sunrise and sunset together; we shall stand before the priest and he shall send us away man and wife. Do you know why people marry, Diâne? Because they want each other as I want you, to have against all others—because they love. Do you know what I mean? Can you want me like that, Diâne?"

As he bent nearer to her she felt the hand clasping hers tighten, and the blood throbbing in his fingers. For a long time they sat and her gaze did not falter. The com-

panionship of the weeks had changed, and she felt a new knowledge and a new joy, indefinable yet overwhelming. Then slowly she answered him.

"Yes, I want you like that. I know what you mean. But—there is more. I cannot tell what it is; perhaps I know not the words. Can you say it?"

"No, Diâne, sweetheart, only that it is love, and no one can tell what it is. It is like life, we can only live it, dear."

"Then we will live it together, you and I," she said.

And she listened to Love's old tale, not with blushes, not with downcast eyes, but with face and eyes lifted to her lover with a glad new light in them. And he said not that the world was well lost for love—the world was forgotten.

They went hand in hand down the hillside, straight to the priest's door. The old man wept with remorse, and blamed himself for neglected duty, while Diâne stood in silent distress. At last, falling on her knees by his side, she pressed his fingers to her lips and pleaded.

"Ah, *mon père, mon père*, you hurt me so. Is it you do not now love your little Diâne? Look at the others in the parish; you have blessed them and let them go away together, and you did not weep. I love you, *mon père*, but I must go, I must go. Let me go like the rest."

Sadly Père Dufresne placed his hand on her bowed head and smoothed her heavy, black hair. "It has come, even to my little maid, *ma petite pucelle*, whom I had thought so far removed from man's love. My daughter, this love of man brings labor and sorrow, brings pain and tears, and you would go even if it must be that you shall bear pain and sorrow and weep your tears alone?"

He spoke more to himself than to her, but she raised her head and answered quickly as if understanding his meaning, or it may be the new-born woman spoke within her.

"Yes, father, I see the women labor, and the labor is hard and the days are long; I see the children many, and the women grow old with each one; and I saw Delize

Paquette crying because there was no one to stand in the church as father to her baby; but, *mon père*, I see, too, the men and women coming from the long day's labor together, and they are happy; I see the children bring smiles to their mothers' tired eyes, and again they are happy; and I see Delize kiss her baby, even as my mother kissed me, and she is happier with that kiss than Madame Bisson who has no child. Bless me and let me go, *mon père*, for my happiness has gone before and beckons to me, and always I see the man's love leading it."

"Enough, my daughter, it shall be as you wish, and may Our Lady have you in her holy keeping."

And so Diâne was wed, not before the altar, no, not there, for the stranger was not of the faith, but without the church door, just where the gaze of Our Lady, high up in her niche near the roof, seemed to rest with benign love and pity.

Then, hand in hand, as Diâne and her lover had come down the mountain side, so they went down the valley, away from St. Gregoire to where her happiness seemed beckoning her. They paused away down where the valley turns sharp behind the last of the hills; the church could just be seen, a little white speck in the distance.

"Oh, if I might know that day by day the good father will feel that I think of him always. There will be no one now to talk to him by the firelight, no one to tell him the words of the hills." Diâne's tone was not one of regretful longing, but rather a great wish that the priest might not feel that she had left him alone.

"If there were something which you might give him, something which would always speak for you," the stranger had answered, feeling that he had indeed taken the sunshine and the song from the old man's life. "Can you think of something, Diâne, that will please him much?"

"There is something," she said, "but I cannot give him that."

"But tell me; perhaps you may."

"It is a bell; we have never had one. It takes very

much money to buy a bell; the people have flax and grain, but, oh, so little money. Père Dufresne said *le bon Dieu* might send us one some time if we were not forgetful."

"A bell it shall be that you shall give him," the stranger promised, but Diâne only smiled wistfully and turned away.

And so they passed beyond the turn in the valley, and the hills shut them away from St. Gregoire.

Soon the snows of winter fell upon all the hills, and more than ever was St. Gregoire lost to the great world outside. In the long evenings Père Dufresne sat by his fire alone, conjuring up the face of his little maid in the moving shadows, and dreaming, till he almost heard her voice as he used to hear it—"Mais oui, mon père, that is what the bird in the cedars said to me as I came by the swamp at sunset." It was thus that he thought of her, and always with a great foreboding and self-condemnation. Day after day dragged slowly by until at last the winter was gone, but neither the spring nor the summer brought assurance to the old priest or eased his loneliness. One thing there came to arouse the parish, even as the engineers had with their suggestion of a railroad. In the early summer a letter had come from over the sea saying their bell would be ready in the autumn. From whom it was to come they knew not; *le bon Dieu* had indeed remembered them.

Then, as the days grew chill again, that which the priest expected and dreaded happened—Diâne came back—Diâne and her baby. Her husband had sailed away to England, to his mother who was dying; as for herself, she could not bear the town alone, she must come back to the old familiar river and her hills to wait for him. That was the simple story she had to tell; to her it was sufficient, but she read anger and grief on the priest's face.

"This is the happiness you sought, the thing I let you wander out into the world to find, and I knew, I knew."

As he bowed his head in sorrow, Diâne knelt and pleaded as she had once before.

"Ah, mon père, it is not that you should grieve, for I

found my happiness. I am happy now, a little lonely, perhaps, till he shall come for me, but he will come. I tell you he will come," she repeated in eager defense as she noted the pained look of doubt. "He is gone as I told you, but I chose to stay. Besides, I am not alone; here is my child, father. The days may be long, but he will come. As I came here I heard the people talking of a bell. It is not yet hung, but when it rings for the first time I shall know he will not be far away."

The prophecy came to her as an inspiration, and her tone of loneliness changed to one of trust and surety.

A tiny log house on the river bank she took for her home. The curé found that his old housekeeper needed strong, young arms to lift the burden of her work, and so Diâne settled into a quiet nook, more silent than of old, and if her longing and weary waiting found words, they were whispered to baby ears by the fireside in the little cabin by the river.

And the bell? There was something strange about it. Autumn passed and winter came, but no tidings of the bell. In the spring came a letter from England saying that the ship bringing the bell had foundered in the Gulf and her cargo was lost. Another bell would come by the next autumn perhaps. Poor Diâne! It seemed an answer to her unwitting prophecy.

The snow disappeared and the birds and flowers came with a rush, as they always come to the Northland. When her work was done, Diâne would take her boy in her arms and wander away to the forests on the hillsides. She could seek sympathy nowhere else. The old familiar groves and hollows and peaks made her feel a strange calmness and resignation after stormy nights of despair and dying hope. Up here it seemed that her husband must be dead, or he would have come; down there by the river the torturing thought of desertion and lost love nearly drove her mad. Up here under the trees she told over and over again to her baby what his father had said when she walked here with him; what he would say if he ever came back; and if he did not come back they must know he was dead.

Thus the summer passed and autumn came again. How she dreaded the winter with its long evenings and the snow-bound world, when there would be naught but the whistling wind, the driving snow, the faint murmur of the river under the ice, and her thoughts.

Then one sabbath Père Dufresne told them that the bell would be there in a week. How Diâne's heart leaped with a vague, new hope! No one knew it was her bell, and that it was so near seemed proof that he was alive and had not forgotten her.

At last it came. All the parish crowded around as it was being lifted from the cart. Diâne looked on from the outer edge of the circle, pale and disturbed, holding her baby so close that he whimpered with pain.

Suddenly an exclamation of anger and disappointment burst from the people. A clumsy handler had let his burden slip and the bell had struck with a jarring ring—its last note. An ugly crack from bottom to top had silenced its voice before it could speak for St. Gregoire.

Diâne sank to her knees with a sob. It was all over; her last faint hope was gone. Now she was certain he must be dead. No one noticed her, for all were listening to the curé who was reading aloud an inscription on the broken bell.

"What? Whose gift? Read it again, father."

Diâne had paid no heed to the curé's words, but the deep silence roused her to find them all regarding her with surprised awe.

"My daughter," said the curé as he came to her side, "the Blessed Virgin has sent her gift in your name; she has looked on her handmaiden with love and favor."

She arose bewildered and he led her to the bell, but she turned away calm and tearless.

"No, no, father. It means he is dead and will not come. Let me go home."

Silently they stood aside and watched her go down the hill. In her sorrow Diâne had touched their hearts. The curé's eyes were dim, and his voice faltered as he blessed them and sent them away.

And now Père Dufresne bethought him that the Bishop might help them, and the bell was sent back to Quebec.

By return messenger came the word that it would be recast, that the parish should have its bell. This Diâne did not know, as the curé thought to calm her grief the sooner if she had no false hope.

After a little she went about her task as before. Her winter evenings were spent now in braiding straw hats. At times, when the straw broke in her weary fingers, she would lay it aside, and kneeling by the rude cradle, would pour out the sorrows of her broken heart in wailing murmurs.

"Ah, why must I suffer so when I know he is dead? My heart aches for one day with him, even for one moment. Why do I start when the wind shakes the door? Why do I listen for footsteps in the whistling of the gale? Why cannot I feel that he is dead when I know he must be? Why do I wake in the night feeling his kiss on my lips? Why does the sound of his voice still fall on my ear, and the light of his eyes meet mine in the twilight? Oh, Mother of Christ, give me peace and strength, or the silence of death for my child and me."

In the last days of the winter word came again concerning the bell, and a few days later came the bell itself. Great care was taken this time. The people were ready to look upon it as a thing bewitched, and even doubted the wisdom of attempting to hang it; but the curé exorcised their superstition. It was blest, and the day came when it would hang in the steeple before all St. Gregoire.

Diâne had felt only pain when she heard that the bell had come. She cared nothing for ceremonies and she had no curiosity, so through it all she kept steadily at her work, not even glancing toward the church on her way home.

Fate was kinder now, and at last the bell was in place, but the first ringing was to be for mass on the sabbath; and so it waited.

The winter had been a terrible one. Snow storm followed snow storm till the drifts piled higher than ever

before. People along the river prayed for a gentle spring, with only south wind and sunshine. Heavy rains meant disaster, perhaps destruction to their all.

Before the sabbath dawned, that which they dreaded came; it rained, a steady downpour for many hours, then a deluge. The ice on the river had had no time to melt, and the floods from the slopes above poured over it without breaking it up. Helplessly the people watched the torrent swell and spread. Nearly every one had moved what he could to higher land, each one striving for himself. Night came on, dark and dreadful. There was no sleep even on the hillsides. The sound of the waters had been deep and threatening, but suddenly in the darkness they burst forth in a roaring crash. Something had happened in the lake above. Thank God, every one had had time to escape danger. Now thoughts turned to fellow creatures and their safety. Yes, all seemed to be safe. But where was Diâne and the child? In the curé's house, of course. No? God in heaven! Was she down there by the river?

"Men to the rescue!" shouted the curé.

In a moment he had hurried to the bell rope, and for the first time the Bell of St. Gregoire rang out clear and strong, even before the roar of the storm and the battle of the waters.

At dusk Diâne had looked at the river almost touching her threshold; but the high land lay back of her; she would not be cut off without warning. She dressed the child warmly before he went to sleep, placed their outer garments in readiness, piled the logs on the hearth and sat down to wait.

Suddenly the house shook and the water poured in at every opening. She sprang to the bed, and in an instant they were ready. But, oh, the awful darkness! The house seemed to be moving from its place. The water was rising quickly. She stood dazed. What should she do? The loft! Quickly she mounted the ladder and broke open the window. She leaned far out—nothing could be seen. She could feel the house moving away on the flood. What was that? The bell! She smiled and laid her face close to the child. Softly she whispered:

"Ah, baby, baby! Mother was right after all. Listen to the bell. I said that when it should ring for the first time he would not be far away, and in a moment we shall be with him. Don't be afraid, dearie. He will be waiting for us, and, at last, after all this long, long time, we shall be together all the days, as he used to tell me, and we shall have you besides. Perhaps he can see us now coming nearer."

She laughed a happy little laugh, the first since she had come back to St. Gregoire. The child was quiet, soothed by the gentle crooning as she murmured on.

"Diâne! Diâne! Shout! Call to me! I am here," came faintly to her ears over the waters out of the darkness.

"Listen, listen, my little one. He is calling to us. Blessed Virgin, I thank thee." Then loud and clear: "Here! Here am I, your Diâne."

Again came the cry, louder and nearer.

"Call again, Diâne! Be brave!"

Again she called. "We are nearer, nearer," she whispered. "Soon it will be light, the great, beautiful Dawn!"

Something else was whirling along the way with them—it loomed near her window. Again the cry, almost within reach.

"Courage a little longer, Diâne. Now! Hold closely to me!"

Our Lady had indeed looked with favor on her hand-maiden, for who, think you, had brought the stranger over sea and land, through storm and peril, by snowshoe and sled track, even into the darkness, to answer to the call of the bell in Diâne's great need? Who had made him listen to the song of his heart, even though the music of home had been loud in his ears, and brought him dreams such as he had dreamed by his campfire that summer, until he could hear Diâne's voice—and his baby's?

Israel Gagnon knows, and Victor Brassard knows and Grandmère Touchette knows and the little *habitant* girl at her flax wheel knows. For as the vesper tones ebb and flow around the hills and along the valley I hear her

murmur Diâne's name and a little prayer to Our Lady, for our little maid, too, has a lover; and as I listen to the bell, now "so beeg it feel all de worl', beeger den all de mountain'," and now "so small an' sof' I can jus' feel it inside me," I, too, know who brought the stranger back to his wife and child.

Pictorial

THE EVENING RICE

BY

ACHMED ABDULLAH

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Up there in the gray North a great triple tomb thrusts its frowning parapet obliquely into space. On its outer walls, to left and right of the entrance, are bas-reliefs in sea-green majolica, representing five-claw, imperial dragons.

It is the Fu-Ling, the Happy and August Tomb, where lies the T'ai Tzu, the Nurhachi, the Iron-capped Prince, the founder of the Manchu dynasty, who centuries ago swept out of the barren Central Asian wastes at the head of his host of red-skinned, flat-nosed horsemen, and turned placid China into a crimson shambles.

Last year the hereditary keeper of the sacred tomb, a Ch'i-jên, a Manchu bannerman, sold it to a moon faced Chinese farmer for a lean sack of clipped silver taels. Next year it will house the farmer's squealing, red-bristled pigs.

And still the Manchu has his sword and the strength of his sword-arm; still the moon-faced coolie is a coward who shrinks at the swish and crackle of naked steel.

Yet, next year, the pigs will dirty the tomb's yellow imperial tiles. And the pigs, too, are symbolic—and necessary.

For what is the evening rice without a few slivers of fried pork?

THE last time Ng Ch'u had seen him had been nearly forty years earlier in the squat little Manchu-Chinese border town of Ninguta, in the hushed shelter of an enameled pagoda-roof that mirrored the sun-rays a thousandfold, like countless intersecting rainbows—endless zigzag flashings of electric blue and deep rose and keen, arrogant, glaucous-green, like the shooting of dragon-flies and purple-winged tropical moths. There had been murder in the other's, the Manchu's, eyes; murder in the hairy, brown fist that curled about broad, glistening steel.

But on that day he, the despised Chinese coolie, had had the whip-hand.

"A Manchu you are!" he had said; and his eyes had glistened triumphantly through meager almond slits. "A

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Manchu indeed! A Pao-i bannerman, an aristocrat—sloughing your will and your passions as snakes cast their skin, brooking no master but yourself and the black desert thunder! And I am only a mud-turtle from the land of Han.” He had sucked in his breath. “But—” he had continued; had slurred and stopped.

“But?”

“But—there is one thing, perhaps two, which the Huang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, does not forgive—not even in a Manchu, an iron-capped prince!”—and a few more words; sibilant, staccato, and at once Yang Shen-hsiu had sheathed his dagger with a little dry, metallic click and had walked away, while Ng Ch'u had returned to his home.

There he had kowtowed deeply before an elderly peasant woman with bound feet, gnarled hands, and shriveled, berry-brown features.

“Mother,” he had said, “I am going away to-day. I am going away *now*. I—and the Moon-beam!”—pointing into the inner room at a lissom, blue-clad form that was bending over the cooking-pots.

“Why, son?”

“There is Yang Shen-hsiu, the Manchu!”

“But—I thought—”

“Yes. I know. But a Manchu never forgets. And some day—perhaps to-morrow—his passion and his hatred, since he is a fool, will vanquish his fear. On that day—by Buddha and by Buddha—I shall not be here. Nor shall the Moon-beam!”

Nearly forty years earlier—and now he saw him again.

For just the fraction of a second, the unexpected sight of those glittering, hooded eyes—for he was conscious of Yang Shen-hsiu's eyes even before he saw the rest of the face: the thin nose beaking away bold and aquiline, the high cheekbones that seemed to give beneath the pressure of the leathery, ruddy-gold skin, the compressed, sardonic lips brushed by a drooping Mandarin mustache, and the flagging, combative chin—for just the fraction of a second, the unexpected sight of those sinister eyes, rising quickly like some evil dream from the human maelstrom that streaked down Forty-second Street, threw Ng Ch'u

off his guard. It conquered in him the long habit of outward self-control which he had acquired in a lifetime of tight bargaining, of matching his algebraic Mongol cunning against the equal cunning of his countrymen.

He stopped still. His round, butter-yellow face was marked by a look of almost ludicrous alarm. His tiny, pinkish button of a nose crinkled and sniffled like that of a frightened rabbit. His pudgy, comfortable little hands opened and shut convulsively. His jaw felt swollen, out of joint. His tongue seemed heavy, clogging, like something which did not belong to him and which he must try to spit out. Little blue and crimson wheels gyrated madly in front of his bulging eyes.

Ng Ch'u was a coward. He knew it. Nor was he ashamed of it. To him a prosy, four-square, sublimely practical Chinese, reckless, unthinking courage seemed incomprehensible, and he was too honest a man to find fascination or worth in anything he could not understand.

Still it was one thing to be afraid, by which one lost no face to speak of, and another to appear afraid, by which one often lost a great deal of face *and* of profit, and so he collected himself with an effort and greeted the Manchu with his usual, faintly ironic ease of manner.

"Ten thousand years, ten thousand years!"

"And yet another year!" came the courtly reply; and, after a short pause, "Ah—friend Ng Ch'u!" Showing that recognition had been mutual.

They looked at each other, smiling, tranquil, touching palm to palm. They were carefully, even meticulously, dressed: the Chinese in neat pin-stripe worsted, bowler hat, glossy cordovan brogues that showed an inch of brown-silk hose, and a sober shepherd's-plaid necktie in which twinkled a diamond horseshoe pin; the Manchu in pontifical Prince Albert and shining high hat with the correct eight reflections. Both, at least sartorially, were a very epitome of the influence of West over East.

In that motley New York crowd, nobody could have guessed that here, in neat pin-stripe worsted and pontifical

Prince Albert, stood tragedy incarnate: tragedy that had started, four decades earlier, in a Manchu-Chinese border town, with a girl's soft song flung from a painted balcony; that had threatened to congeal into darkening blood, and that had faded out in a whispered, sardonic word about the Huang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, and a coolie's stupendous Odyssey from a mud-chinked Ninguta hut to a gleaming Fifth Avenue shop; tragedy that, by the same token, had started four centuries earlier when red-faced, flat-nosed Tatars, led by iron-capped Manchu chiefs, had poured out of Central Asia, to be met by submissiveness—the baffling submissiveness of placid, yellow China—the submissiveness of a rubber ball that jumps back into place the moment you remove the pressure of your hand—the submissiveness of a race that, being old and wise, prefers the evening meal of rice and fried pork to epic, clanking heroics.

For a moment Ng Ch'u wondered—and shivered slightly at the thought—if Yang Shen-hsiu's perfectly tailored coat might hold the glimmer of steel. Then he reconsidered. This was New York, and the noon hour, and Forty-second Street, youthful, shrill, but filled with tame, warm conveniences, and safe—sublimely safe.

"I hope I see you well, honorable Manchu?" he asked casually, lighting an expensive, gold-tipped cigaret with fingers that were quite steady.

"Thank you," replied Yang Shen-hsiu. "I am in excellent health. And yourself?"

"Nothing to complain of."

"And—" purred the Manchu; and, beneath the gentle, gliding accents, the other could sense the hard, unfaltering resolve of hatred emerging from the dim, wiped-over crepuscule of forty years into new, brazen, arrogant freedom—"the—Moon-beam?"

"Is the Moon-beam no longer?"

"Her spirit has leaped the dragon gate—has rejoined the spirits of her worthy ancestors?"

"No, no." Ng Ch'u gave a little, lopsided laugh. "But the Moon-beam—alas!—has become Madame Full Moon. She has grown exceedingly fat. As fat as a peasant's round measure of butter. *Ahee! ahoo!* Age fattens all—

age softens all—and everything—” His voice trembled a little, and he repeated, “All and everything!”

Then, rather anxiously, his head to one side, with a patient and inquiring glance in his eyes,

“Does it not, Yang Shen-hsiu?”

The latter scratched his cheek delicately with a long, highly polished finger-nail.

“Yes,” he said unhurriedly. “Age softens all and everything—except belike—”

“So there are exceptions?” came the meek query.

“Yes, Ng Ch’u. Three.” A light eddied up in the glittering, hooded eyes. “A sword, a stone, and—ah—a Manchu.”

Ng Ch’u dropped his cigaret. He put his fingers together, nervously, tip against tip.

“You have recently arrived in America?” he asked after a short silence.

He spoke with a sort of bored, indifferent politeness, merely as if to make conversation. But the other looked up sharply. The ghost of a smile curled his thin lips.

“My friend,” he replied, “I, too, am familiar with the inexplicable laws of these foreign barbarians which put the yellow man even beneath the black in human worth and civic respect. I, too, know that we of the black-haired race are not permitted to enter this free land—unless we be students or great merchants or dignitaries of China or came here years ago—like you. I realize, furthermore, that babbling, leaky tongues can whisper cunning words to the immigration authorities—can spill the tea for many a worthy coolie who makes his living here on the strength of a forged passport. But—” smoothly, calmly, as Ng Ch’u tried to interrupt, “it so happened that the Old Buddha looked upon me with favor before she resigned her earthly dignities and ascended the dragon. I, the very undeserving one, have been showered with exquisite honors. Very recently I was sent to America in an official capacity. Thus—as to the Chinese exclusion law, also as to babbling, leaky tongues that whisper here and there—do not trouble, Ng Ch’u. Your tongue might catch cold—and would not that cause your honorable teeth to shrivel?”

He paused, stared at the other, then—and a tremor ran over his hawkish features, as a ripple is seen upon a stagnant pool even before the wind of storm strikes it—went on in a voice that was low and passionless, yet pregnant with stony, enormous resolve,

“Coolie! I have never forgotten the Moon-beam. I have never forgotten that once the thought of her played charming cadences on the lute of my youthful soul. I have never forgotten that once her image was the painted pleasure-boat that floated gently on the waters of my dream-ruffled sleep. I—ah—I have never forgotten that once the Moon-beam was a yellow, silken rose, and that a coolie brushed the bloom from her petals with his objectionable lips. No—I have never forgotten.”

“And—” asked Ng Ch’u, a little diffident, but quite matter-of-fact, like a bazar trader who is not yet sure of the size of his customer’s purse and must therefore bargain circumspectly—“is there no way to—make you forget?”

“Assuredly there is a way,” the Manchu laughed.

“Oh—?”

“What sayeth the Li-Ki—? ‘Do not try to fathom what has not yet arrived! Do not climb the tree if you wish to catch fish!’”

And Yang Shen-hsiu went on his way, while Ng Ch’u looked after him with a rather comical expression of devout concentration of his round face, clasping and unclasping his short, pudgy fingers, pursing his lips, and emitting a sort of melancholy whistle.

He was a coward, and very much afraid. He was only a coolie, tho the receiving teller of the Hudson National Bank purred civilly over his deposit-slips.

And the other? A Manchu. An aristocrat. A sharp hatchet of a man who cleaved his way through life. Why, even Yang Shen-hsiu’s back, beneath the prim and decorous folds of the Prince Albert, gave an impression of steely, ruthless efficiency—the efficiency of a hawk’s claw and a snake’s fang.

“Assuredly,” Ng Ch’u said to himself, as he turned east down Forty-second Street, “if I were a fool, I would now write to China and complete my funeral arrangements. I would order longevity boards of seasoned wood

and cause the priests to pick out a charming retreat for my earthly remains. Too, if I were a fool, I might quote the Book of Ceremonies and Outer Observances to the tiger about to gore me. Ah—but I am not a fool—I am only a coward—I beg your pardon!” as his head sunk on his chest, he bumped into an indignant dowager who came from a department store, her plump arms crowded with bargains. “I beg your pardon—”

“Goodness! Can’t you see where you’re going—?”

A bundle dropped. Ng Ch’u bent to pick it up. So did the woman. Ng Ch’u straightened up again and, in the process, butted her chin with a round face that was still earnestly apologetic.

Another bundle dropped. People stopped, snickered, nudged each other. The woman suppressed unwomanly words. Ng Ch’u then decided to go away from there.

“*Haya! haya!*” he continued in his thoughts as he went on his way. “Blessed be the Excellent Lord Gautama who made me a coward! For—is there a keener foresight, a better protection, than fear?”

And, head erect, he walked along, toward his up-town shop that faced Fifth Avenue, beneath an enormous sign bearing his name in braggart, baroque, gilt letters, with a profusion of China’s and Japan’s choicest wares—dim, precious things—bronzes mellowed with the patina of the swinging centuries and embroideries and white and green and amber jade; kakemonos in sepia and gold and pigeon-gray, on which the brush of an artist long since dead had retraced the marvels of some capital of the Ashikaga dynasty; ancient koto harps with plectrums of carved ivory; satsuma bowls enameled with ho-ho birds; but mostly the porcelains of China—porcelains of all periods—Wen-tchang statuettes in aubergine and lambent yellow Kang-he ginger-jars painted with blue and white hawthorn sprays, Keen-lung egg-shell plates with backs of glowing ruby, Yung-ching peach-blow whose ruddy-brown shimmered with flecks of silver and green and pink like the first touch of Spring that is coaxing the colors from the shy sepal of the peach-blossom.

He loved porcelains. They represented to him more than money, more than success. He had attached himself

to their study as an old Florentine attached himself to the study of theology, caring nothing for religion, but with a sort of icy-cold, impersonal, scientific passion. Somehow—for there *was* his fabulous Odyssey, from a mud-chinked Ninguta hut to a gleaming Fifth Avenue shop—these porcelains were to him the apex of his life, the full, richly flavored sweetness of his achievement; and he often gently teased the Moon-beam, who had become Madame Full Moon, because, in their neat Pell Street flat, she preferred to eat her evening rice from heavy, white American stoneware with a border of improbable forget-me-nots.

“Good morning,” he smiled as he crossed the threshold of his shop.

“Good morning, sir,” came the answering chorus from the half dozen Chinese clerks, while his chief salesman, Wen Pao, stepped forward and told him that, an hour earlier, his good customer, Mrs. Peter Van Dissel, had come in and bargained about that pale-blue Suen-tih Ming bowl with the red fish molded as handles.

“Seven thousand I asked,” said Wen Pao. “Five thousand she offered—then five thousand five hundred—then six thousand. She will return to-morrow. Then she and I will talk business.” He smiled. “The eye of desire fattens the price,” he added.

“Ah—excellent!” replied Ng Ch’u. “Trade indeed revolves like a wheel. She can have the bowl for six thousand five hundred dollars. It is a noble piece, worthy of a coral-button Mandarin’s collection.”

He turned to look at the sheaf of letters that awaited his perusal on a teak-wood table at the back of the store.

Then, suddenly, he again addressed the clerk.

“Wen Pao,” he said. “I have reconsidered. The bowl is not for sale.”

“Oh—?” the other looked astonished.

“No,” repeated Ng Ch’u. “It is not for sale. Put it in the small safe in my private office. One of these days, when a certain necessary thing shall have been pleasantly accomplished, I shall use the bowl myself, to eat therefrom my evening rice. There is no porcelain in the world,” he went on rather academically, “like ancient Ming

marked on the reverse side with the honorific seal of peace, longevity, and harmonious prosperity. It rings sweetly—like a lute made of glass—under the chop-sticks' delicate touch."

"Ho!" whispered Nag En Hin, the American-born son of Nag Hop Fat, the Pell Street soothsayer, who had recently graduated from high school. "In the estimation of some people the strings of their cotton drawers are equivalent to a Manchu's silken breeches of state."

Ng Ch'u had overheard.

"They *are* equivalent, little, little paper tiger without teeth," he purred—"in durability—"

He turned and bowed low before a customer who had entered the shop; and, for the next three hours, there was in his coward's heart hardly a thought of his old enemy. Only dimly the figure of Yang Shen-hsiu jutted into the outer rim of his consciousness, like a trifling annoyance, which, presently, when the time was ripe, he would cause to pass out of his consciousness altogether.

Nor, except indirectly, did he speak of him to the Moon-beam that night, after he had returned to his Pell Street flat that, close to the corner of Mott, faced the gaudy, crimson-bedaubed joss temple—he rather liked its proximity. Not that he believed much in the ancient divinities—the Tsaou Kwo-kiu who sits on a log, the Han Seang-tse who rides upon a fan, the Chang-Ho-laou who stands on a frog, the Ho Seen-koo astride a willow-branch, or any of the other many idols, Buddhist or Taoist. For he was a Chinese, thus frankly, sneeringly irreligious. But he had rare, thaumaturgical moments when his bland-philosophical soul craved a few ounces of hygienic stimulant in the form of incense-powder sending up curling, aromatic smoke, a dully booming gong, a priest's muttered incantations before the gilt shrine, or a meaningless prayer or two written on scarlet paper and then chewed and swallowed.

It was so to-night.

"Moon-beam," he said to his little fat wife, who smiled at his entry as she had smiled at him every day these forty years, ever since she had married him, the earth-

bound coolie, in preference to a Manchu who had courted her riotously, swaggeringly, extravagantly, willing to leap all barriers of caste, "I think that after the evening rice I shall go to the temple and burn a couple of Hunshuh incense-sticks before the three gods of happiness—the Fo, the Lo, and the Cho." He smiled amusedly at the thought. "Perhaps the gods are powerless to help me," he added with patronizing tolerance, "perhaps they are not. Still—" again he smiled and waved a pudgy hand.

The Moon-beam continued setting the table for dinner.

"You are in trouble, Great One?" she asked, quite casually, over her shoulder.

"Oh—the jackal howls in the distance," he answered, metaphorically, easing his plump body into a comfortable American rocking-chair. "Yes—" He lit a cigaret. "The jackal howls. Loudly and arrogantly. And yet—will my old buffalo die therefore?"

She did not reply. Nor was she worried.

For she knew Ng Ch'u. For forty years she had lived in intimate daily alliance with him, physically and psychologically. She knew that he was a one-idead man who always surrendered completely to the eventual aim and object of his slow, patient, persistent, slightly nagging decision; who never took the second step before he was sure of the first; who possessed, at the core of his meek, submissive soul, a tremendous, almost pagan capacity to resolve his mind in his desire, and his desire in the actual, practical deed. Yes—she knew him. And never since that day in the little Manchu-Chinese border town when she had become his bride, according to the sacred rites, with all the traditional ceremonies complete from *kuei-chü* to *laoh-shin-fang*, had she doubted either his kindness or his wisdom; never, tho often she walked abroad, in Pell Street, to swap the shifting, mazed gossip of Chinatown, had she envied the other women—whites and half-castes and American-born Chinese—their shrill, scolding, flaunting, naked freedom; always had she been satisfied to regulate her life according to the excellent Confucius' three rules of wifely behaviour: not to have her marital relations known beyond the threshold of her apartment, either for good or for evil; to refrain from talkativeness.

and, outside of household matters where she reigned supreme, to take no step and to arrive at no conclusion on her own initiative.

Ng Ch'u was in trouble. He was the Great One. Presently he would conquer the trouble.

What, then, was there to worry about?

And so, dinner over, she busied her fat, clever little hands with strips of blue-and-blue embroidery, while he prepared for himself the first pipe of the evening—"the pipe of august beginning," as he called it.

"Ah!" he sighed contentedly, as he kneaded the opium cube with agile fingers, stuck the needle into the lamp, the flame of which, veiled by butterflies and moths of green enamel, sparkled like an emerald, dropped the red-hot little pellet into a plain bamboo pipe without tassels or ornaments, and, both shoulders well back, inhaled the soothing fumes at one long whiff—"this black bamboo pipe was white once—white as my youth—and the kindly drug has colored it black with a thousand and ten thousand smokes. It is the best pipe in the world. No pipe of precious wood or ivory or tortoise-shell or jade or carved silver can ever come near that bamboo."

He stopped; prepared a second pipe. The fizzing of the amber opium drops as they evaporated over the lamp accentuated the silence.

Presently he spoke again.

"Moon-beam!"

"Yes, Great One?"

She leaned forward, across the table. Her wrinkled, honey-colored old face, framed by great, smooth wings of jet-black hair, loomed up in the ring of light from the swinging kerosene lamp.

"An ancient pipe," he repeated, "blackened with a thousand and ten thousand smokes. *Ahee*—" he slurred; then went on, "such as—"

Again he halted. Then he continued, just a little diffidently, a little self-consciously, as, Mongol to the core, he considered the voicing of intimate sentiments between husband and wife slightly indelicate—"such as our love, Moon-beam—burned deep and strong and black

by a thousand and ten thousand days of mutual knowledge—”

She looked at him. She rose. She put her arms about him.

They were rather ludicrous, those two. Yellow, fat, crinkled, old, decidedly ugly. Standing there, holding each other close, in the center of the plain little room. With the garish lights of Pell Street winking through the well-washed window-curtains, the symphony of Pell Street skirling in with a belching, tawdry chorus; a street organ trailing a brassy, syncopated jazz; the hectic splutter and hiss of a popcorn-man's cart; some thick, passionate words flung up from a shadow-blotched postern, then dropping into the gutter: “Gee, kid, I'm sure nuts about you!” “G'wan, yer big slob, tell it t'the marines—”

Yes. Ludicrous, that scene.

And ludicrous, perhaps, the Moon-beam's words, in guttural, staccato Chinese,

“Great One! Truly, truly, all the real world is enclosed for me in your heart!”

He looked at her from beneath heavy, opium-reddened eyelids.

“Moon-beam,” he said, “once you could have been a Manchu's bride.”

She gave a quaint, giggling, girlish, high-pitched little laugh.

“Once,” she replied, “the ass went seeking for horns—and lost its ears.” She patted his cheeks. “I am a coolie's fat old woman, Great One! An old coolie's fat, useless old woman—”

“Little Moon-beam,” he whispered, “little, little Moon-beam—”

It was the voice of forty years ago, stammering, passionate, tender. He held her very close.

Then, unhurriedly, he released her. Unhurriedly, he left the room, walked down the stairs and over to the joss temple.

There—his tongue in his cheek, his mind smiling at his soul—he went through a certain intricate ritual, with

shreds of scarlet paper, and incense sticks, and pieces of peach-wood especially dreaded by ghosts.

Yu Ch'ang, the priest, watched him, and—since even holy men must eat and drink—suggested that, perhaps, the other might like sacerdotal intercession with the *Shang Ti*, the Supreme Ruler of Heaven.

Ng Ch'u laughed.

"I have always avoided middlemen," he said. "That's how I made my fortune. Shall I then offend the deity by talking through a priest's greedy lips?"

And he left the joss temple, and walked out into the street.

It was late. Rain, that had started in fluttering, flickering rags, had driven both dwellers and sightseers to shelter. Black, silent, the night looked down. Across the road, from his flat, the lights sprang out warm and snug and friendly. But he remembered that there was some urgent business matter he had to talk over with Ching Shan, the retired merchant who was his silent partner, and that at this hour he would be most likely to find him sipping a cup of hot wine in the back room of Nag Hong Fah's restaurant, which, for yellow men exclusively, was known euphoniously as the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity.

So he turned toward Mott Street. But he kept to the middle of the street, and he stepped slowly, warily, heels well down, arms carefully balanced, head jerked slightly forward, his whole body poised for instant shift or flight, all his senses primed to give quick warning of anything unusual or minatory.

For again, now that he was alone, fear of Yang Shen-hsiu had rushed upon him full-armed; and here—with the sodden, pitchy blanket of night painting the shadows with deeper shadows, and the rain-whipped streets deserted by everybody—was the very place where murder might happen, had happened in the past, in Tong war and private feud—the corner saloons with their lurking side entrances, where a man might slip in and out like a rabbit through the tunnels of its warren; the inky, prurient, slimy halls and areaways; the sudden, mysterious alleys cutting edge-wise into mazes of buildings; the steep cellars that yawned

like saturnine, toothless maws; the squat, moldy, turgid tenements, with the reckless invitations of their fire escapes.

Ng Ch'u shivered. Should he turn back, make a run for his home?

And—what then?

To-morrow was another day. To-morrow the sun would shine golden and clear. True. But to-morrow the Manchu would still be the Manchu; and Ng Ch'u was sure of two things: that Yang Shen-hsiu would plot his speedy death, and that, even supposing he broke the unwritten law of Pell Street, it would be quite useless to go to the police of the red-haired devils and ask them for protection.

For could he, the merchant, accuse the other, the great Chinese dignitary sent to America on a diplomatic mission? And of what? What could he say?

Could he make these foreigners believe in this tale of China, of forty years ago? Could he tell them that he and the other had been in love with the same girl, that she had preferred the coolie to the aristocrat, and that the latter had sworn revenge? Could he tell them that those had been the days directly after China's war of eighteen hundred and sixty against France and England, when the imperial court had been compelled to leave Peking and flee to Jehol, when the Summer Palace had been taken and sacked by the barbarians, when a shameful treaty had been forced on the Middle Kingdom, and when the Huang T'ai Hou, the Empress, the Old Buddha, had issued an edict that, until a "more propitious time" the lives of foreigners should be sacred in the land of Han? Could he tell them how he had found out that the Manchu, in a fit of rage, had murdered, and quietly buried, a British missionary; how thus, by threatening exposure to the Peking authorities, he had held the whip-hand; how, discretion being the better part of valor, he and the Moon-beam had emigrated to America; and how now, to-day, forty years later, he had met the Manchu here, in New York—still the same Manchu—hawkish, steely, ruthless—?

Ng Ch'u shook his head.

He could imagine what Bill Devoy, detective of Second Branch and Pell Street specialist, would say,

"Cut it out! Ye've been hittin' the old pipe too hard. What? Manchu? Dowager Empress? Moon-beam? Missionary? Revenge? Say—ye've blown in too many dimes on them—now—seven-reelers! Keep away from the movies, Chinkie—see?"

Ng Ch'u shivered. He jumped sidewise rapidly as he heard a rustling noise. Then he smiled apologetically—it had just been a dim stir of torn bits of paper whirled about by a vagabond wind—and turned, at a sudden right angle, toward Nag Hong Fah's Great Chop Suey Restaurant where it slashed the purple, trailing night with a square of yellow light.

A minute later, his heart beating like a trip-hammer, he was up the stairs. Two minutes later, outwardly composed, he bowed, his hands clasped over his chest, to the company of merchants who were gathered in the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity, some quietly smoking or sipping tea, others gossiping, still others playing at *hsiang ch'i* chess and *ta ma*.

The soft, gliding hum of voices, the sizzling of the opium lamps, the sucking of boiling-hot tea drunk by compressed lips, the clicks of the copper and ivory counters—it was all tremendously peaceful and reassuring; and Ng Ch'u sighed contentedly as he dropped into a chair by the side of Ching Shan, his silent partner, and began talking to him in an undertone about a shipment of Sheba pottery which could be picked up at a bargain in San Francisco.

Presently, business over, he asked a question.

"Brother very old and very wise," he said, "what are the protections of the day and the night against an evil man?"

Ching Shan was known throughout Pell Street for his stout wisdom—a reputation which he upheld by quoting esoterically and didactically from some hoary tome of learning, whenever asked a question, and then reinforcing his opinion by a yet lengthier quotation from another book.

"Ng Ch'u," he replied, "it has been reported in the Shu

King that the sage Wu once spoke as follows: 'I have heard that the good man, doing good, finds the day insufficient, and the night, and that the evil man, doing evil, also finds the day insufficient, and the night.' " He paused, looked around him, made sure that not only Ng Ch'u but also the rest of the company were listening to him attentively, and continued: "Yet, as to the evil man, and the good, has it not furthermore been said that the correct doctrine of the good man is to be true to the principles of his nature and the benevolent exercise of these principles when dealing with others?"

"Even when dealing with evil men?" asked Ng Ch'u.

"Decidedly, little brother."

"Ah—" smiled Ng Ch'u, "and the principle of my nature has always been to see that I have pork with my evening rice—to bargain close and tight—to know the worth of money—"

"Money," said Nag Hong Fah, the restaurant proprietor, "which is the greatest truth in the world—"

"Money," chimed in Yung Long, the wealthy wholesale grocer, "which is mastery and power and sway and shining achievement—"

"Money," said Ching Shan rather severely, since he had retired from active business affairs and was not worried by financial troubles, "which is good only when used by a purified desire and a righteous aim—"

"What aim more righteous," rejoined Ng Ch'u, "than peace and happiness and the evening rice—"

And then, quite suddenly, a hush fell over the Honorable Pavilion of Tranquil Longevity. Tea cups were held tremblingly in mid-air. Pipes dropped. Voices were stilled.

For there, framed in the doorway, stood three figures, lean, tall, threatening; faces masked by black neckerchiefs; pistols held steadily in yellow hands.

"Oh—Buddha!" screamed Nag Hong Fah. "The hatchetmen—the hatchetmen—"

"Silence, obese grandfather of a skillet!" said the tallest of the three. "Silence—or—" His voice was terse and metallic; his pistol described a significant half-circle and

drew a bead on the restaurant proprietor's stout chest. He took a step nearer into the room, while his two colleagues kept the company covered. "My friends," he said, "I have not come here to harm anybody—except—"

His eyes searched the smoke-laden room, and, as if drawn by a magnet, Ng Ch'u rose and waddled up to him.

"Except to kill me?" he suggested meekly.

"Rightly guessed, older brother," smiled the other. "I regret—but what is life—eh?—and what is death? A slashing of throats! A cutting of necks! A jolly ripping of jugular veins!" He laughed behind his mask and drew Ng Ch'u toward him with a strong, clawlike hand.

The latter trembled like a leaf.

"Honorable killer," he asked, "there is, I take it, no personal rancor against me in your heart?"

"Not a breath—not an atom—not a sliver! It is a mere matter of business!"

"You have been sent by somebody else to kill me—perhaps by—?"

"Let us name no names. I have indeed been sent by—somebody."

Ng Ch'u looked over his shoulder at Ching Shan who sat there, very quiet, very disinterested.

"Ching Shan," he said, "did you not say that the correct doctrine of the good man is to be true to his principles and the benevolent exercise of these principles?"

"Indeed!" wonderingly.

"Ah—" gently breathed Ng Ch'u, and again he addressed the hatchetman. "Honorable killer," he said, "the nameless party—who sent you here—how much did he promise you for causing my spirit to join the spirits of my ancestors?"

"But—"

"Tell me. How much?"

"Five hundred dollars!"

Ng Ch'u smiled.

"Five hundred dollars—eh?—for killing me?" he repeated.

"Yes, yes!" exclaimed the astonished hatchetman.

"Five hundred dollars—eh?—for killing me?" he broke into gurgling laughter. "Correct doctrine to be true

to one's own principles! Principles of barter and trade—my principles—the coolie's principles—*Ahee!—ahoo!—ahai!* Here, hatchetman!" His voice was now quite steady. Steady was the hand with which he drew a thick roll of bills from his pocket. "Here are five hundred dollars—and yet another hundred! Go! Go and kill *him*—him who sent you!"

And, late that night, back in his neat little flat, Ng Ch'u turned casually to his wife.

"Moon-beam," he said, "the little trouble has been satisfactorily settled." He paused, smiled. "To-morrow," he added, "I shall eat my evening rice from a pale-blue Suen-tih Ming bowl with red fish molded as handles."

"Yes, Great One," came the Moon-beam's calm, in-curious reply.

Short Stories

THE TAKING OF BILLY RAND

BY

GORDON YOUNG

THE TAKING OF BILLY RAND¹

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FOR reasons that might be called confidential, since they were known only to Billy Rand himself and to the police, he took the tip of a friend wise in geography and made for a speck on the map called Ponape—a bit of an island that sticks out inconspicuously in the South Seas.

He landed on a beach where there were some natives that he mistook for “niggers” and a lot of Germans.

Said Billy Rand to a German trader:

“I’m travelin’ for my health and lookin’ for a quiet spot. I need rest. This here Langar is too thrivin’ a metropolis. It reminds me of New York.”

He looked out of the doorway to where a half dozen little trading schooners were anchored, and at the corrugated iron warehouse; but most particularly he looked at the two wireless masts. Those were what reminded him of New York.

“Ja,” said the trader, and tipped the empty beer bottle significantly.

Billy took the hint. More beer came. Then the trader warmed up slightly and talked.

Billy didn’t know exactly what was being said. No fortune teller had ever warned him that he ought to study German.

The trader pointed here and there, and Billy twisted his head about to see. Then he began to realize that the German was talking of directions. Which way did Billy want to travel?

Billy took a chance and poked his finger in the same direction that his nose happened to be.

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The trader agreed that it was a desirable choice and put out his hand, palm up. The sign language had never seemed so eloquent to Billy before.

That was how Billy came to be landed on the beach some two hundred miles from Langar. The bay was pretty and the trader had given him to understand that a missionary lived there.

But alone on the beach Billy couldn't see anything but niggers. They swarmed about him, grinned, looked him over curiously, fingered his clothes, felt of him, and chattered. He wished heartily that he was back in New York explaining to the judge just how it happened. The trader was already standing out to sea.

The natives half carried, half dragged the squatty little man with the dapper manner, alias Billy Rand, up the beach and through the bushes until they came to a cleared space where there were grass houses and women cooking.

"Just in time for dinner!" he said to himself, and nearly fainted.

Then a man came to the door of one of the grass houses. He was a comparatively young man, fine looking—Billy thought—and not at all like the beachcombers, missionaries and Germans with which Billy had already become acquainted. And Billy could not imagine that any one other than those people—beachcombers, missionaries and Germans—would hide themselves away in such outlandish places unless for "confidential" reasons.

"Who are you?" the man asked. It seemed to Billy that there was something pryingly suspicious in the question.

Rapidly he hastened to assure this stranger:

"It's all right. I came along for quiet and rest too. I know just how you feel when a stranger comes along your trail. Now I've—"

"I don't know what you mean," said the other, looking puzzled. Billy noticed that he had brown eyes that looked almost sad.

"I'm in the same fix as you," Billy explained vaguely.

"A missionary?" the man asked.

"Me a what!"

And Billy followed it up with a few remarks that

showed he was far from having been trained as a missionary.

The man looked relieved, though he did say quietly:

"You see, I'm a missionary. From what you said I judged that you, too—well, I want neither a rival nor an assistant—but," he added quickly, "anybody else is welcome."

Billy cast a speculative eye over the crowd of natives ringed about him.

"Say," he confessed frankly, "I was awfully glad to see you. These fellows had me scared stiff."

The missionary laughed. "They can't imagine any one being afraid of them."

"Ain't they got no lookin' glasses?" Billy demanded.

The missionary laughed again and invited him into his house.

Billy at first had a nightmarish sensation as he stepped in; lizards, birds and things, some dried, some stuffed, some pickled in bottles, some stuck on cards—bugs and butterflies and flying squirrels and even some bright-scaled fish.

"Have a little drink?" asked the missionary. "And here is a pipe and some tobacco—trade tobacco. Wretched stuff. Just make yourself at home. And tell me, what's going on in the world? I've been here four years."

Billy reflected that this man might be a missionary, but he was a good judge of whiskey, though he took only a little for himself and after filling Billy's glass put the bottle away.

Later another drink for Billy alone was forthcoming; and he, already wanting to stay on and on with the missionary and not wanting him to think that he, Billy, was a murderer or something, up and told just what he would have told the judge if he had not been able to keep just about two jumps ahead of the detectives that were on his trail.

Billy naively explained that he wasn't going to confess to anybody that he had carried the money from a certain firm of paying contractors to a certain man that could—and did—control the awarding of paving contracts.

"An' was it police or a woman with you?" Billy inquired

pointedly, feeling that an exchange of confidence was due.

The missionary gave him a quick glance, then smiled and said that he was really a naturalist, but was officially a missionary because the Germans, who owned the Carolinas, were more agreeable to missionaries than to scientists—of other countries.

"A woman," Billy said to himself, noticing how handsome and young the missionary was. His name was Roscoe Tomlin.

In the next few weeks they got well acquainted. Billy helped, as the natives did, to catch bugs and things and pickle them. He picked up a few words of the dialect and soon had the pickaninnies taking a great fancy to him.

Then, just as Billy was getting settled to the new life and beginning to feel secure, a little steam yacht nosed cautiously into the mouth of the bay.

The natives made a dash for the beach, tumbled into canoes and went splashing out to give greetings and get presents.

Tomlin was off in the bush chasing bugs and things.

Billy, not being anxious to receive visitors himself, went near the beach and reclined behind a convenient rock.

Presently he saw a boat dropped from the davits. People got into it. One of them was a woman. They landed on the beach and, in about two minutes, Billy sauntered out to make sure that she was as pretty as she looked. The men who had rowed ashore stayed in the boat, but she got out with a little man who had a Vandyrke beard, a cap and doublebreasted serge coat.

"No detective," said Billy reassuringly to himself, "would attempt that disguise."

"Hello," said the little fellow seeing that Billy was a white man.

Billy didn't like his looks. Just why, he could not have told. But he didn't like 'em. He wasn't frightened though—besides, she was getting prettier and prettier at every step.

Her hair was red and her eyes were purple with fire in them; her lips were red as a flame-tree's flower, or maybe more red. She was slender without being slim and moved as easily as a pandanus leaf swinging in a little breeze. Billy was very susceptible to beauty. He would have thrown himself face down right there on the sand for her

to walk on at the least suggestion that such an attitude would be pleasing to her. She was young without being girlish—nor was there anything old womanish about her. No. Billy, who was a bit hazy on historical events, was sure that she looked exactly like those women who bowl kings off their thrones, get men assassinated—or whatever else they want. Not that she looked wicked. No. But—well, Billy was a long way from home and she wore her clothes as they are worn on the Boardwalk; she carried herself as women do on Fifth Avenue. And then she was pretty.

"Is there a man here by the name of Roscoe Tomlin?" the little man asked, turning hard blue eyes on Billy as though he were a bum or wastrel.

"Who's he?" said Billy, looking innocent.

"Who are you?" the woman asked. She spoke pleasantly, encouragingly, as though Billy interested her. He and the ladies always did get along, anyway.

"I'm Billy Rand," he said. "The missionary's assistant."

"And who is the missionary?" She asked it quickly, eagerly.

"Mr. Roscoe Tomlin," said Billy, bowing low.

"You—you—you," the little man stuttered angrily, "why didn't you tell me that when I asked you?"

"Because," Bill answered, looking right at him, "I didn't know the lady was interested!"

"I'll fix you!" the man shouted, and came toward Billy as though about to do something he shouldn't.

He was about Billy's size—and Billy never ran in front of ladies, not pretty ones at any rate.

But hostilities were suppressed peremptorily. She snapped out in a surprised tone:

"Captain Farewell!"

The Captain stopped. Anybody would have stopped.

"That's all right," Billy assured her. "Us missionaries is used to such fellers. Bad lot o' men come to these islands—crooks and things!"

The Captain appeared to be on the verge of blowing up; but she—she did not seem to notice. She smiled as she asked:

"Is Mr.—I mean is the Rev. Mr. Tomlin as—as pugnacious as you?"

"Him?" asked Billy. "Why, he trained me! He eats 'em alive."

"Cannibal, eh?" said the Captain. "I told you how white men degenerated among the natives," he remarked to her. Then of Billy he asked, "Is this Rev. Mr. Tomlin married or—"

He stopped right there. Billy didn't quite know what the Captain was driving at, but sensed enough to make him want to fight.

"Has Mr. Tomlin a wife?" she asked.

"Has he a *native* wife?" the Captain emphasized.

"Lady," said Billy, getting hot inside, and when he got hot inside he was likely to be blunt in his remarks, "supposin' some stranger come to a friend of yours and asked are you married to a nigger!"

She flushed and caught her breath, but someway it seemed that she was very much pleased, though she said: "You are right. I apologize. But will you please take us to Mr. Tomlin. I am a friend—a former friend of his."

So Billy led them up to the house, and the natives came along chattering and grinning and wanting to touch the woman's clothes. Billy warned them off repeatedly with a strange mixture of native words and New York slang.

The Captain, speaking like a man does who has something on his mind, asked:

"And how long have *you* been here, Rev. Mr. Rand?"

"Me? Oh, let's see. Two—no not quite two years. Be two years soon. A feller sort o' loses track of time in a place like this, you know."

"So I would judge!" said the Captain with a strange intonation that caused Billy some vague uneasiness.

It stood this way with Billy: The District Attorney back in New York was after the Chief. Certain contractors lost money on a job and that made them peevish, so they swore that they had handed out a bribe to get the contract awarded to them. The Chief stood pat and said: "Prove it!" Billy had carried the money. If Billy confessed, the District Attorney had the proof. But Billy jumped. If he should be caught and still refuse to come through with a confession, it was highly probable that the District Attorney would pry loose some little episodes

in Billy's past and hand him something. He would not snitch on the Chief and as he did not like the accommodations at Sing Sing, Billy had been ducking and dodging all over the Pacific, and the detectives—though they had never laid eyes on him—had been stubborn and alert as ferrets in a rabbit warren. It wasn't that Billy had a criminal record—far from it. But he had been in practical politics as an aid to the Chief. This was a stubborn political fight involving some pretty big pickings, and he had the misfortune to be a crucial witness. So Billy grew very thoughtful at the way Captain Farwell spoke.

He led the guests into the house and had them sit down. They looked at the bugs and pickled lizards and stuffed fish, but the woman did not shiver.

"This has always been Roscoe's habit," she said.

Billy sent some of the native youngsters for green coconuts and poured a drink of cool milk for the guests. The woman was eager and busy with questions, wanting to know everything knowable about Tomlin; and the Captain watched Billy steadily and continued remarks that made him nervous.

Billy reflected that the Captain was not a big man in any way—something like himself in build, only a trifle thinner—and, well, a fight wouldn't help much to keep him out of New York, but it would be gratifying.

While they were talking, Tomlin came.

The natives had told him about the witch-boat—any boat, in their minds, was driven by the devil if it did not have sails—and about the white woman and man being in the house.

He was naturally interested. Tourists were often nosing around in yachts, but he had never seen any before. He came over the doorway—the doorways were built high to keep the pigs out—and said with general friendliness:

"I hope Billy is making you comfortable."

"Yes, Roscoe. Quite comfortable," she said, turning her face toward him.

"You!—Lorraine—here!"

"Why, of course. How are you Roscoe? Didn't you get my letter? This is Captain Farwell. Mother is aboard the *Petrel*, but she isn't well."

Tomlin looked at the Captain and nodded, still in a daze.

From the way he looked back at Lorraine, Billy did not know whether Tomlin had a peeve and wasn't trying to show it, or didn't have one and wanted to pretend. Lorraine seemed wiser. She smiled at him in a way that, Billy thought, ought to have made a statue come from its pedestal and be human.

Billy recognized that four was a multitude and said:

"Captain, you just come with me, and I'll show you a cocoanut grove or a sunset or something."

Lorraine frankly rewarded Billy with a smile and a glance.

The Captain hemmed and hawed, but she said as politely as though she meant it: "Certainly Captain, we'll excuse you. I remember you said you wanted to see a real native village. Mr. Rand, I'm sure, will be an excellent guide."

"Yes," said Tomlin, feeling no doubt that he ought to say something, "Billy has been here only a few weeks, but he knows the natives almost as well as I."

Billy at once felt himself crumbling from the inside. He had counted much on an alibi that would give him a two year residence on the island.

Lorraine seemed to realize that something was wrong. She caught Billy's eye, and in about the tenth part of a second, then and there with nothing more than a sparkle of light from under her long lashes, made an offensive and defensive alliance with him.

When they were outside the Captain said:

"How one must lose track of time here! Remarkable, isn't it! I feel as though I'd been here several days."

"The cocoanuts are down this way," said Billy, starting off.

"By the way, Rand, I don't suppose there is any way of getting out of this place, is there?" the Captain asked.

"How do you mean, get out?"

It was a question uppermost in Billy's mind.

"I mean any of these islands—off like this. Just before we left Langar I heard of a couple of detectives from New York. They have tracked their man half way around

the world, and discovered that about two months ago—maybe a little less—he left Langar with a German trader. The trader is out now on a trip and they're waiting for him to come back and tell them where he dropped this man.

"Neither of these detectives, so I heard—the steward talked with them—has ever seen the man. But they have a good description of him, a very good description. Short inclined to be chubby—though possibly he's thinned out some since he became a fugitive—blue eyes, dark brown hair. Somewhat resourceful, they say. Passed himself as a waiter and got passage on a government transport to Guam. Pretended to be a discharged marine at Guam and shipped with a pearl pirate for Yap. At Yap he became a planter and doubled back to Langar. They don't know what he told the trader, but they know this trader never makes anything but little islands out of touch with the world. They figure that they have their prize this time. Haven't seen anybody of his description, have you?"

Billy came very nearly to saying yes; but what would be the use? In normal spirits he would have told the Captain that the description fitted himself—the Captain—pretty closely. But Billy was in no mood for humor.

"I am telling you all this so that in case you ever run across the fellow you can send word to Langar. Quite a reward for him, I understand. The detectives are waiting there. They heard the *Petrel* was cruising about, and asked the steward to notify everybody on board. They are very impatient. I am sure if they got wind of where the fellow was they would hire a schooner and go for him."

"Can't arrest him without the consent of German authorities, can they?" Billy inquired.

"Not properly, of course. But they can smuggle him out. Once they get their hands on him they will not stop to ask questions until they get to New York. This fellow is so resourceful and tricky that they won't give him half a chance to make trouble for them."

Billy did not answer. He was beginning to feel a kind of companionable sympathy for the lizards that he and Tomlin caught and smothered in chloroform before "pick-

lin' 'em." No matter where he went he felt that he never appreciably increased the distance between himself and 240 Centre Street, New York—Police Headquarters.

But Billy wasn't the only one who was having troubles. Lorraine and Tomlin came walking toward the beach, and a blind man could tell that neither of them was happy. The Captain, not being blind, appeared perky and pleased.

"Aren't you coming to see mother?" she asked wistfully as she got into the boat. Perhaps she was too proud to ask him to come on her own account.

"To-morrow, Lorraine. To-morrow," he said in an empty voice that showed he scarcely knew what he was saying.

"To-morrow!" he said, not without a touch of anger. Then to Billy, "Mr. Rand, will you come and have dinner with me—now!"

"I sure am delighted!" said Billy, and without looking toward the reproachful eyes of Tomlin or the glaring eyes of the Captain, he climbed into the boat, and gave all of his attention to Lorraine's.

Billy thought the *Petrel* was about the finest thing imaginable, all white and shiny, and he thought the dinner was too much for mere words to describe—with just himself and Lorraine at the table. The mother was not well, but she looked much worse when Lorraine said that Tomlin wouldn't come—until to-morrow.

At dinner Billy got the whole story. Of course Lorraine didn't intend to tell it, but she did—at least enough of it for him to understand that some years before she had loved Tomlin and he had loved her, and that they were promised, each to the other. But of course there had loved Tomlin and he had loved her, and that they was rich and he was poor and had "pride"—also a passion for bugs and things. There isn't much money to be made out of that sort of study, and she objected to being expected to live on what he made from it—when she was rich as an Indian princess. Her father offered to help Tomlin along in business, but Tomlin insisted that his career was in studying bugs, and that made the father peevish and he said that Tomlin didn't need help. Nat-

urally Tomlin then grew more peevish and said that the father and his money could go to the—well, wherever it is that rich men go on Judgment Day when they fail to get through the eye of the needle. And, of course, that made Lorraine peevish, and she said that Tomlin didn't love her. But he said that he did and always would, but that he had "pride." So the engagement was shattered, and Lorraine married a man rich as she was. But Tomlin had her heart and she couldn't forget him. Besides, she felt that maybe after all she was to blame. When her husband died from overwork of the stomach, she inquired and found that Tomlin had turned missionary to the Caroline Islands. She talked with her mother, and the mother, having known all along how Lorraine felt, said to do it, so Lorraine sent Tomlin a letter (the mail is delivered to stray missionaries once every three or four years), took the *Petrel*, engaged Captain Farwell, and set out to locate Tomlin, being aided thereby through the Board by Foreign Missions which had him down on its payroll for \$35 every three months. But as converting heathens isn't a very paying business, there were times when he did not get that.

It was a long trip. And Captain Farwell, being a single man and feeling himself as attractive as any missionary, continually told her of how white men degenerated in the tropics and—well, the inference was that no woman could ask for a better husband than a sailorman of just his height and age. He might as well have suggested himself as the consort for the Empress Dowager of China. But the Captain had ideas and believed himself a very resourceful gentleman.

"And Roscoe," she said bitterly, "still has that awful 'pride' of his!"

"He loves you, don't he?" Billy demanded.

She looked a little startled, but admitted that Tomlin had said he did and had never loved any one else; and her eyes seemed to ask Billy what he thought of a man who would love a girl and not show it.

Billy was a man of some attainment in the use of his wits. He had lived by them for many years. He assured Lorraine that all Tomlin needed was a little friendly

advice and to "leave it to me!" She was a bit alarmed at Billy's proprietary manner in taking over her love affair, but they were a long way from home and the conventions of New York.

And when Billy started to leave she said: "And by the way, Mr. Rand, if for any reason you care to leave on the *Petrel*, whether or not Roscoe comes, you will be welcome. And we are not going back by way of Langar!"

"Them detectives 'll be awfully disappointed if you don't," Billy said frankly, wondering just how much Tomlin had told her, and what the steward had told her—or Captain Farwell?

Billy got into the boat to be taken ashore, but the sailors said that they were waiting for the Captain, too. Presently Captain Farwell came and as the boat shoved off in the darkness, there was a crackling and snapping on board the *Petrel*. Billy had noticed the wireless. He was not much of a sailor and besides it had seemed natural for ships to have tall poles and wires and ropes.

"Mr. Rand," said the Captain, when he came, "I'm sending to Langar a description of the man we met on the island this afternoon."

Of course, he said it that way so the sailors wouldn't understand.

"And I believe," he went on, "that I can persuade the owner of the *Petrel* that it would be wiser to go back by way of Langar."

So the Captain had been listening.

Billy settled down on a thwart and tried to think.

"It will take the detectives about two days to get here. Much may happen in two days."

Billy hoped so.

The Captain left Billy to ruminate until the boat hit the beach. Then he got out and said that he would walk a bit with Billy.

"You know," the Captain began, "if Tomlin should not leave on the *Petrel* I don't believe that we would go back by way of Langar."

Billy said nothing. He didn't quite understand.

"And in that case, if you were on board the detectives would never meet you."

"Go on," said Billy. "I'm interested."

"But if Tomlin remained—and was able to talk, understand—he would tell that you had gone on the *Petrel* and you wouldn't be much better off. Besides, the *Petrel* would be into trouble for having tried to do you a favor. They would get hold of the *Petrel* some way."

"That's right," said Billy. "Now tell it all."

"I'll be frank with you. You are a bad crook, so I don't suppose one crime more or less means much to you, does it?"

"Naw, I'm bad!" said Billy grinning to himself in the darkness.

"Listen then. You kill Tomlin and I'll see that you get away. Let him live this night out and I'll put you in irons and carry you to Langar myself."

"Ooo-oo," said Billy. "I'm in a pickle."

"You are," said the Captain, speaking firm.

"With Tomlin out of the way, you think this girl can be consoled by being Mrs. Farwell. Am I some guesser?"

"You discuss your own business. Not mine."

"Sure. You've got what they call the upper hand."

"I have." The Captain was a man of decision; very firm, too.

"How's the best way to go about it to keep Tomlin quiet?"

"Knife him."

"All thought out!" said Billy, admiringly.

"Yes. Here's a knife. Don't leave it lying around. If you do I shall swear you stole it from me."

"I'll bring it back to you."

"You'll do it then?"

"I'll come to the *Petrel* in the mornin' and say a nigger done it."

"That's right. Don't fail me. It'll go hard with you."

"I believe you," said Billy, as the Captain turned away and walked back toward the beach.

Billy, grinning thoughtfully, went up to the house. Through the doorway he could see Tomlin with his elbows on the table, his hands in his hair, sitting amid his troubles. The lantern hanging from a beam made him look like a great grotesque image carved from teak.

Billy climbed over the doorway.

"Billy—" Tomlin said anxiously, ready to ask questions.

Billy did not answer, but started gathering up his few belongings, and making a great show of that.

"Billy, what are you doing?"

No answer, but much rummaging.

"Billy, have you gone crazy?"

"Nope."

"What are you doing?"

"I'm movin'."

"Moving? What's the matter?"

"I got *pride*," said Billy.

"Pride? What on earth is the matter with you?"

Then Billy told him. That is Billy explained how he had landed on the beach and been living on Tomlin's charity, and he simply couldn't stand it any more. His pride wouldn't let him stand it. He was going back in the bush and hunt berries and bugs of his own.

"But Billy—are you crazy? I've done nothing for you. I've liked you—I want you to stay."

"Nope. I got *pride*!"

"You idiot!" Tomlin cried, jumping up, his strained nerves at the breaking point.

"Who's an idiot?"

"You are. All this means nothing to me. I'm glad to share it with you. Anything—everything. I like you—and you—you—"

"—then why don't you marry her?" Billy cut in.

Tomlin's face went blank as the palm of his hand.

"What does all that mean to her? She just wants to share it with you. And you got pride. Aw, you just want her to coax and beg."

"Look here—what are you talking about?" Tomlin demanded.

"See this knife," said Billy, flourishing the long, cold blade. "Well—" and Billy told him everything.

A few hours later Tomlin was talking like a happy child and trying to shave while Billy sat at the table painfully trying to write a note.

Tomlin knocked over a shelf of pickled lizards.

"Look out!" Billy exclaimed.

"To hell with 'em!" said Tomlin.

"A missionary to—"

"I've thought out my letter of resignation," said Tomlin.

Billy finished his note and put it in his pocket, saying: "I'll rout out some niggers and you come about fifteen minutes after me. Meantime I got to kill a chicken."

He slipped out and feeling under the low eaves grabbed a sleepy fowl. Captain Farwell's knife was soon a very grewsome object.

Just before dawn Billy paddled out to the *Petrel*. He inquired for Lorraine's cabin and banging on the door slipped her his note with a word or two of explanation, then returned to the deck.

"Mr. Tomlin was murdered by natives last night," he said to a sailor on watch. "The lady wants me to tell the Captain."

Billy was shown to the Captain's cabin and the sailor went to spread the news forward.

"Who's there?" said the Captain.

"Me," said Billy. "The niggers killed Tomlin last night!"

"Come in," said the Captain, excited. Billy came in. "Shut the door."

It was shut.

"Lock it."

Billy fumbled with the lock.

The Captain was in bed, sitting up, nervous.

"He is dead?"

"See this?" said Billy, pulling out the knife.

"Why didn't you wipe it off?"

"All right," said Billy as he grabbed the end of the sheet and wiped the blade.

"You fool—the stains—here—"

"Where else should they be? Us murderers has to stick together."

"Are you trying to implicate me? But I've got you—I'll swear—you're going to murder me!"

With that the Captain sprang out of bed and began yelling "Murder! Help!"

The door opened and Lorraine stood there, just as Billy had requested. Her hair was tumbled down and she wore a kimono of white silk with blue birds. Her face did not look pleasant, and her eyes were cold and straight, but she said quite calmly:

"Captain Farwell, I have been listening with the door ajar ever since you told Mr. Rand to lock it!"

With that she turned and walked off.

The Captain dropped his jaw, and then himself. He flopped like a sack of flour into a chair and sat there staring at Billy.

"You see, Cap," said Billy, friendly-like, "I'm wanted back in New York as a witness in a bribery case. Not for murder. And seein' as you don't want it, I think I'll keep this knife as a little souvenir."

The Captain said nothing, so Billy kept the knife and went out, shutting the door.

Down the passageway he came upon Tomlin with his arms around Lorraine, and she was weeping happily.

Billy overheard "—as soon as we can find a minister."

"But you are one!" she insisted. "And Mr. Rand— isn't he—"

Tomlin exploded into laughter.

But Billy intervened.

"Scuse me for interferin' with the reunion, but if you are lookin' for a weddin' ceremony, allow me to offer my services."

Tomlin looked surprised for it was obvious that Billy was in earnest.

Billy hastened to explain that when he had come over to Guam on the transport the captain had married an officer and a nurse, so it appeared that captains could marry people—though a missionary's assistant couldn't!

"That's right!" said Tomlin.

Lorraine was inclined to object.

"Then we must wait, my dear."

"We have waited so long!" she said, thereby agreeing to the Captain's performing the ceremony.

The Captain was still in pajamas and on his chair and showed all the visible symptoms of nervous prostration.

"Captain," said Billy, cheerfully, "we'd like to have a knot spliced this mornin' and seein' as how you are a sailor—"

"Will you be good enough to perform the wedding service?" Tomlin asked, sternly. After all it was his, not Billy's wedding.

The Captain choked and was badly scared, but at last managed to say that he was "agreeable," although he didn't appear to be.

Billy grabbed a pair of sailors for witnesses, the Captain fished out a Bible—and Mr. and Mrs. Roscoe Tomlin marched out blushing and happy to break the news to mother; whereupon the old lady climbed right out of bed, cured.

That afternoon the Captain had a little talk with Mr. and Mrs. Tomlin and said that he would like permission to go ashore and stay there, as relations on board had become somewhat strained. He knew that a boat would be along in two or three days (the detectives had answered that they were coming). It was very irregular—a captain leaving his ship that way—but Tomlin said that all things considered, he thought it would be well.

So the Captain said good-bye to the steward and whispered something that caused the steward to look hard at Billy; then he, the Captain, left, bag and baggage.

That day was spent in getting Tomlin's bugs and lizards on board and in saying good-bye to the natives.

The next morning with the First Officer on the bridge, the *Petrel* steamed out and left the Captain sitting on the beach—very glad to have got away without charges being laid up against him.

Mr. and Mrs. Tomlin cornered Billy and asked what on earth they could do for him.

"Yesum," said Billy. "Just drop that steward overboard."

Mrs. Tomlin promised that at the first port they reached the steward would be fired and given passage money home.

As the day passed Billy walked the deck and exchanged jokes with the First Officer, who was the new Captain—and glad of it, because he had never liked Farwell anyhow. Then a little trading schooner came over the line, bow on.

Billy knew right away by intuition that she carried the detectives.

When within hailing distance the schooner heaved to and the *Petrel* slowed down.

A fellow from the bow called out to thank the Captain for having tipped him off as to the crook wanted in New York, and asked if he was still in the nigger village.

The new Captain didn't quite understand; but Billy grabbed the megaphone and yelled: "Yes—raised a beard—stole papers and clothes from the ship—may try to pass himself off as a Captain or something—clever crook, you know—let 'im explain nothin' or you won't get him to New York. Good luck!"

A shout of thanks came over the water as the *Petrel* started churning ahead.

Billy looked after the little schooner, and taking a deep breath, said gratefully to himself, "The Lord helps them as helps 'emselves! Can you see the D. A. when he gets hold of old Cap. Farwell expectin' to see little Billy!"

The Woman's Home Companion

ACCORDING TO RUSKIN

BY

HARRIET WELLES



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DURING the first few days after the Armistice was signed I seemed, for some strange reason, to wish to sit idly in my room in the London hotel where I was temporarily domiciled.

Ever since I had left my home in America, the days in war-time England had been so full, so tensely crowded, that each seemed crammed with events—events, occurring somehow in an eternal twilight that will always recur to me with the memory of the unbearable, shadowy premonition of an approaching night; the sight of troops marching across the city under faint stars, dim against the afterglow; laden lorries lumbering, convoy wagons creaking, through the dusk; constantly returning ambulances, with their endless gleanings, seeming to leave a perceptible shadow long after they had passed. Even the pot of parrot tulip bulbs, purchased to brighten my window sill, finally blossomed, and contributed to my illusion of twilight by producing wan, colorless flowers.

And then the Armistice was signed, and I awakened from my doze to find it bright morning with dazzling sunshine! Small wonder that most of us drew a long breath and, blinking uncertainly, hesitated. . . .

But, after a few days, old ties reasserted themselves. I had been too busy, too harassed, before, to look up old friends; now, I sat down and wrote the one for whom, during a year in the Orient where her husband and mine each held an official position, I had grown to have a very deep admiration and affection. "It will be pleasant to see a real English family in their own home, during the first days of peace," I planned, remembering my friend, her pleasant husband, and their three sons and one pretty daughter.

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Before her answering letter, urging me to make them a long visit, came, my plans were suddenly changed, my sailing date hastened. I was able to arrange for only one afternoon with her in the cathedral town where she lived, near London.

The only books on sale at the railroad station book stall were war literature, for which, now that the nightmare was so recently over, I had a deep repugnance, so I dug out from a pile of miscellaneous books a cheap paper-covered volume of Ruskin's essays, and settled myself to improve my mind, while the toy train moved leisurely on its punctual way.

My friend waved to me from a wicker pony cart as I alighted from the train at her station. She bridged the years which stretched between our last meeting, half a world away, and the present, by the friendliness of her greeting, the sincere warmth of her welcome. "There wasn't anyone to hold this fractious beast, or I wouldn't be sitting here," she apologized as she kissed me.

"He looks peaceful enough," I commented, taking the seat beside my hostess.

"*She* isn't! Since our horses were commandeered, and we were allowed only eight gallons of petrol a month for the motor, we've had to depend on this pony. She's put on a lot of side since she realized that she was a war-worker," volunteered my friend as the pony shied heraldically at a baby carriage. "She's seen that perambulator—or others like it—every day for the last fifteen years, and never noticed until now."

The pony, suddenly bored by her own antics, slowed down to a jog trot; we rounded a grove of trees, and came upon a typical English village dominated by a gray cathedral. "How quaint—how peaceful!" I exclaimed with unfeigned enthusiasm.

"Yes, it is a dear old place," she agreed, and hesitated: "I suppose that, in a way, it's peaceful, too, if you can overlook the sorrow or suffering in every house. Our older men will have to stay in harness and bear the burdens much longer than heretofore; the middle generation is wiped out. We must wait for the lads who are children now. There isn't one young man left, in this village, who

isn't lame or blind," she said, and indicated with her whip a cottage doorway. On the step a blond boy leaned idly against a post. Something in his lack of cognizance of us made me look more closely. "Blind, deaf from 'shell-shock,' and his right arm gone," my friend explained.

I mentally searched for a pleasanter subject. "You haven't told me of your family—your husband, Daphne, the boys? I was so excited at seeing you that I waited to ask," I said.

We were passing the green cloister of the cathedral. Above us towered the gray pile with its buttresses, gargoyles and columns; from an unseen belfry a deep-toned bell sounded the hour, a silvery chime supplemented the old canticle: "He . . . watching over Israel . . . alumbers not . . . nor sleeps."

My friend listened intently. "Sometimes, when bad news arrived, or the severely wounded came home, I've wondered. I've questioned," she said. I knew that she referred to the message of the bells.

"You needn't question any more. Now, you know!" I comforted.

"Yes," she agreed, "now I know—it had to be. All English mothers are sure of that."

There was in her tone quiet and sincere earnestness that any comment seemed superfluous and impertinent, so in silence we drove on down the long road and passed through a stone gateway and up a curving avenue to the most perfect Georgian house that I have ever seen. She smiled at my enthusiastic admiration.

"I used to get so homesick for it, in China," she volunteered; "my great-great-grandfather built it on the ruins of an older place of ours which had burned."

An old stableman hobbled up to take the reins. We went in past an elderly parlor maid who had opened the door, and I instantly succumbed to the perfection of the sunshiny hall, with its floor of black and white marble, and the square, paneled rooms opening off on either side of it.

"We've had tea in the garden every afternoon, it has been such a beautiful, open autumn. But perhaps you'd

prefer having it in the house?" suggested my friend.

"I'd much rather have it in the garden," I agreed, reluctantly detaching my attention from the Adam mantelpiece and turning to examine the carved corners of the old wall panels. The rooms were veritable museums of rare and beautiful furnishings; they showed a finished perfection of detail, from the wax candles in the crystal chandeliers to the faded needle-point upholstery on the Chippendale chair seats.

"Just think of the generations of discriminating people whose taste is represented in your home! Didn't any of them ever make mistakes and buy black walnut horrors?" I cried, and added, "What a magnificent heritage to hand down, unspoiled, to your children!"

She did not answer. I turned and found her staring down at the sturdy carving on a superb oak bench. "My great-great-great-great-grandfather's favorite seat," she explained, rousing herself. "He sailed with Drake . . . and was a firm believer in the unalterable greatness of England, and England's future. . . as I am a believer in it!" She paused. "But sometimes I wonder . . . what will become of our household gods. . . ."

"*Become of them?*" I cried. She interrupted me.

"Must you really go back to London this afternoon?" she asked, and at my reluctant affirmative continued, "I've ordered tea early for that reason. Shall we go out into the garden? . . . Ah, Daphne!"

I turned to greet the daughter of the house as she came down the stairs, and drew a deep breath of pleasure. She had been a pretty girl, but now she was even lovelier, and while the contrast between her soft dress and lace hat and her mother's severely plain attire was striking, I felt thankful that, in war-weary England, Beauty was encouraged.

"Daphne—and grown up!" I greeted her.

She smiled. "Were you at my wedding?" she asked.

"Why, no! I didn't even know that you had been married," I commented. Her mother interposed: "We hadn't time to look up addresses or have invitations engraved. George's leave was so short."

Daphne was not listening; now, she interrupted, "Tea

—so soon? In the garden?" And without waiting for an answer glanced at the shabby volume still clasped in my hand. "Book? Any pictures?" she asked. I smiled. "You haven't grown up at all!" I told her, and added, "Ruskin's essays—without illustrations!"

The parlor maid appeared in the doorway. "Tea is served," she announced. We followed her to the garden entrance. "Everything here is so *quiet!*" I said as we went through the gate. "Oh!" I cried, "this is a perfect as the house!" and gazed entranced at the long vistas of box-lined paths, the grouped battalions of clipped yews, and the massed planting of cosmos, chrysanthemums, and flaming dahlias.

My friend smiled. "You should see it in August when the white lilies make a mist of blossoms along the walls, and forget-me-nots are reflected in the pool," she said.

"And the poppies!" cried Daphne.

Almost sharply her mother denied: "Not poppies, Daphne. Never again poppies! I've given orders for the poppies to be weeded out as fast as they come up."

She gave careful attention to the making of the tea. "Not such good tea as we had in the Orient," she apologized.

We spoke of our winer in Hong-Kong and the visiting dignitaries. "Wonder what has become of the Austrian duchess who wore the silver dress and huge diamonds at the dinner at Government House?" or, "Did you ever hear again of Mrs. Carson, who ran away with that young German? I was told that they are living in Tasmania," or, "How did the Llewellyn marriage turn out? You remember we didn't think it would be a success?" And recalled the terrible typhoon which had come up so suddenly that hundreds of unprepared, helpless sampans and junks were swept into the port of lost ships. "I'll never forget the abject terror of some of those Chinese sailors who, as the junks swept by, were chanting their appeal to the sea-god." I said.

She agreed soberly, remembering the tragic day. "I like to think of that incongruous Scotch regiment with the bagpipes, marching gayly along the walks bordered

with tall blossoming poinsettias that flamed against the brown banks," she supplemented. We relived a summer in the mountains of Japan, and laughed over the memories of various mishaps when we had tried, unavailingly, to "hustle the East." "I've never been able to look a hard-boiled egg in the eye since we patronized those Chuzenji tea houses," I said; "if all the embryo chickens I devoured were suddenly to appear—"

"Heaven forbid!" agreed my friend. We laughed together.

Daphne had wandered off. I could see her white figure, misty against the rosy mauve of the cosmos; I wondered if she had lost interested memory of the Japanese holidays she had so much enjoyed. She had not spoken of them or recalled our former friendship and now, oblivious of me, I could hear her happily humming an old song. I felt chilled, grieved, and mystified; Daphne had been very much attached to me during the old days; I had looked eagerly forward to seeing her again, and now she treated me as though I were the most casual acquaintance, I thought; then took myself sharply in hand. "You're stupid!" I accused mentally. Aloud, I said, "How happy Daphne seems! I suppose that you expect her husband back any time, now?"

My friend set the teapot down; for a second, as she did not answer but sat gazing across the sunshiny garden. I thought that she had not heard. Then she turned and faced me. "No—" she commenced.

Daphne had come up behind me. "Tea?" she asked, and took the cup that her mother had prepared for me, then, sitting down, she asked, "Were you at my wedding?"

"No," I answered; "tell me about it."

"Flowers! We had flowers, and there were flags. I had a white dress—" she began, then stopped blankly.

Her mother took up the account. "We made it as pretty as we could," she said. "Of course, last year, no one had much heart for celebrating except at a wedding! Daphne's two cousins were the bridesmaids; they carried big loose bunches of moss-roses from this garden—somehow garden flowers seemed more suitable for weddings during those

days when home, and all that homes stand for, were the real issue of the war."

She paused, then went on: "My husband came down from his training camp and gave Daphne away. I'd been working two days a week, for over three years, among the widows and mothers of sailors, at Deptford. Poor bereaved souls! Daphne's wedding was the first thing that had awakened interest in some of them. They'd grown used to me; then fond of me; then part of my family; and they wanted to see my daughter's wedding. They filled nearly half of the church—silent women, in their decent black, rightful heirs to the glory of the old flags draped against the pillars and the bronze commemorative tablets set in the walls."

She seemed for a moment to have forgotten me, then, remembering, went on, "It hadn't occurred to me until, as I sat in the old church waiting for Daphne's wedding, that never, since England has had a navy, has there been a time when a son of our family has not served in it."

"A fine tradition," I praised, "a glorious promise for the future years!"

There was silence. Across it the bell in the cathedral tower called the hour; the chimes spoke.

My friend waited until the last echo died away, then faced me. "You never saw Hugh, my second son? He had already entered the navy when we went to Hong-Kong." Her voice was carefully emotionless and clear. "Our place on the navy lists is vacant. Hugh went down in the 'Invincible' during the Jutland battle," she said, then added, "Our boys commence their naval training very early. Hugh was such a wee lad when he said good-by . . . and now—" Her voice lowered to a whisper—"Sometimes, in my dreams, I see the horror and confusion of that sinking ship . . . the greedy rush of the gray waters—" She regained her composure. "Curious things, dreams?" she inquired conversationally.

I gasped. "My dear! Why didn't you tell me—instead of letting me blunder on? Are Jeffrey and Wallace too old to begin a naval career? But of course they are," I floundered on.

Daphne had wandered back to us. "I'll have some more tea," she said.

"Three cups, Daphne!" I chided, glad of the interruption.

"You really shouldn't drink so much strong tea, Daphne," her mother admonished absently.

To my amazement Daphne struck the table violently with her clenched fist. "Tea!" she demanded. Her mother, without comment, poured it out. "How Daphne has changed—and her mother, too! She used to be so severe with her children about any lack of courtesy," I thought.

My friend broke the silence. "Do you remember Mrs. Gordon, whose husband was on the 'Tamar' at Hong-Kong?"

I nodded.

"Commander Gordon was with the ships that went down off your South American coast," she said. "For some time we thought that he was lost; but later the news came. He had been rescued. Mrs. Gordon was so splendid through it all! Her happiness has been the one warming thing. . . . Do you know, I don't believe that some of our women will really realize the bitterness of their loss until they see other women's husbands and sons coming home."

"I'm so glad for Mrs. Gordon," I said, remembering the tall commander and his gentle, pretty wife.

My friend made no comment. A little silence fell. Across the peaceful old garden some rooks, homeward bound, called from the oaks; the bitter tonic scent of chrysanthemums and box lingered in the still air. It was so quiet that we could hear the organ and choir commencing vespers at the cathedral. War, its agonies, tortures, and despair were mere unmeaning words—transparent nightmares of speech, illusive as dreams against the background of this noble, serene, and tangible English landscape, which breathed of centuries of peace.

I sighed with thankfulness for my friend; in spite of her sailor son's death, her world seemed full of the promise of happiness in the advancing years. Then I glanced at

my watch and saw that my visit was nearly over. "Do you think that your war-working pony will consent to another trip to the depot—or shall I walk?" I asked.

She smiled. "You won't have to walk," she promised. I gathered up my gloves and purse, while she stood idly turning the pages of the volume of Ruskin's essays. A paragraph caught her interest. She glanced at it, then, with attention, read aloud:

"I shall therefore divide the war of which I would speak to you under three heads. War for exercise or play; war for dominion; and, war for defense."

"H'm'm," I commented grimly, "Ruskin's dead; if he were alive I doubt if he would have found anything very playful about *this* war."

She made no comment, but read on:

"Now, remember, whatever virtue or goodness there may be in this game of war, rightly played, there is none when you thus play it with a multitude of human pawns. . . . If you, the gentlemen of this or any other kingdom, choose to make your pastime of contest, do so, and welcome; but set not up these unhappy peasant-pieces upon the checker of forest and field. If the wager is to be of death, lay it on your own heads, not theirs. A goodly struggle in the Olympic dust, though it be the dust of the grave, the gods will look upon and be with you in; but they will not be with you if you sit on the sides of the amphitheatre, whose steps are the mountains of earth, whose arena its valleys, to urge your peasant millions into gladiatorial war."

"I suppose he means compulsory military training," I said.

She did not answer. "Human beings are very pitiful, I think," she said, "striving, hurrying, grasping—and for such paltry rewards." She turned to me. "How many times, during your life, have you been completely, unquestioningly happy?" she demanded.

"Well—" I parried uneasily.

"You can't remember once," accused my friend, "no

one can! If, for a few minutes, out of doors in the sunshine you are happy, how soon the old worries, the old fears, the old griefs, come flooding back. What's it all about?"

I answered soberly, "Surely there is a cure—a way out of such a condition," I said.

"How American—how practical!" she commented dryly, and added: "Don't forget to let me know when you discover it."

I felt queerly uneasy, worried and unhappy. "You won't get anywhere by slumping," I scolded.

"I wasn't getting anywhere, before," she retorted; then questioned: "Wonder if those women feel that the second-hand furniture, pictures, and half-worn underclothes their husbands looted, at their behest, are worth what they have cost?"

I was startled. "What women?" I asked.

She flipped open my dog-eared book. "Do you just *buy* Ruskin? Why don't you *read* him?" she asked, and hunted for a place. "Now listen!" she said, going on in her quiet, clear voice.

"I, for one, would fain join in the cadence of hammer strokes that should beat swords into plowshares; and that this cannot be, is not the fault of us men. . It is *your* fault. Wholly yours. Only by your command, or by your permission, can any contest take place among us. And the real, final reason for all the poverty, misery, and rage of battle, throughout Europe, is simply that you women . . . are too selfish and too thoughtless to take pains for any creature out of your own immediate circles. . . . Now I tell you this, that if the usual course of war, instead of unroofing peasants' houses, and ravaging peasants' fields, merely broke the china upon your own drawing-room tables, no war in civilized countries would last a week. . . ."

"I don't consider Germany a civilized country," I volunteered. "Did Ruskin really write that?" I asked, and reached for the book. "I hope it's translated into their language," I supplemented.

"They wouldn't read it; they don't need any advice about guarding the looted bric-à-brac on their tables," she said.

"Be thankful that our returning men can hold their heads proudly erect," I exulted.

"Our returning men," she repeated.

We were walking toward the house. "When do you expect Jeffrey and Wallace home? Is Daphne's husband back?" I asked.

She held the little volume in both hands and looked evenly at me: "Jeffrey was killed at Mons during the first month of the war. Wallace was refused several times on account of his eyes. 'What would you do if your glasses were broken?' they asked him the last time he applied. He went out and bought six pairs, and they accepted him. He never needed a second pair," said my friend in her quiet, emotionless voice.

I laid my hand on her arm. "My dear—" I cried, and could go no further. She turned her head away.

From behind us came Daphne's voice singing an old song of laughter and love and a garden of roses. She joined us and looked puzzledly at her mother. "What is it?" she questioned.

"We've been speaking of your brothers," I whispered.

She started at me. "Brothers?" she asked.

I glanced at her with astonishment. "Jeffrey and Wallace, who were with you at Hong-Kong," I said.

"Jeffrey—Wallace—Hong-Kong," she repeated parrot-like after me, in vague and troubled bewilderment, then brightened: "Were you at my wedding? We had flowers and flags!"

I could only stare at her.

Her mother motioned me into the wide hall. "Daphne and her husband were spending his leave, and their honeymoon, in London; they were just coming out of a theatre when a German air raid started. George was killed . . . and Daphne struck on the head . . . by some falling masonry. For days we thought we couldn't pull her through—then the up-turn came."

"Oh!" I exclaimed. "Oh!"

"She doesn't remember. 'Never will remember,' the doctors say," repeated my friend, and laid a comforting hand on my arm. "Of course you couldn't know," she said; very earnestly she added: "You see how completely life has finished with me? Well, let me tell you something: If the Huns, and their ideas, had been allowed to dominate the world, it wouldn't have been a tolerable place for any right-thinking, self-respecting, *decent* man to live in. And since the only way to remove that menace was through the sacrifice of thousands of boys like our sons . . . I, who stand bereft, to-day, tell you that I am glad that things are as they are."

I could not speak.

At the doorway she bade me an affectionate good-by. "My husband will be very sorry to have missed you. Don't forget that you'll always find us here, with a welcome for you," she said. With a wave of her hand she indicated the wide landscape sloping away into far blue hills. "At least we have saved this, *untouched*," she added bleakly.

"I'll be back," I promised, and turned away to hide the blurring tears.

Saved, untouched; clean hands; a clear conscience; the right to look any man, or woman, in the eyes. A green country with violet-shadowed valleys dreaming in the sunshine; the fairylike chime of cuckoo's notes calling—calling—calling; woods, and tree tops outlined against the wide sky; lazy cows knee deep in the reeds bordering a silvery brook; homeward-faring pigeons on gleaming wings; the drowsy note of distant church bells; the hum of bees; pearly mists of rain; the ripple of wind over wheat; the blackbirds' flutelike call; wide-eyed daisies; darting swallows, and the scent of meadow-sweet: England.

And yet—and yet (oh, broken hopes and dreams) the lonely days that stretch ahead! *The quiet years.*

Young's Magazine

THE CRYSTAL FLASK

BY

PAUL ROSENWEY

THE CRYSTAL FLASK ¹

By PAUL ROSENWEY

YOUNG GWILLAM, fresh and brown from his two years in the wilds, and with two inches added to his chest measure, hurried to the club and searched for Drysdale. He found his Petronius sitting just as he had left him, in the accustomed well-cushioned chair, in the accustomed corner, on his face the accustomed quiet, faintly amused smile. Gwillam drew up a chair opposite; the necessary ceremonies were performed, and then they plunged into one of those long garrulous gossips, which they both liked so well.

"I saw Craig, to-day," said young Gwillam, after a time. He paused.

"Yes," said Drysdale, non-committally.

"He looked badly," added Gwillam suggestively. Drysdale made no answer.

Gwillam leaned forward. "Tell me what has happened," he urged. "I liked Craig; he was always a good sort of fellow. And he is young too—not much older than myself; but to-day he looked like an old man—thin, gray, stooped—a wreck."

"He has discovered the virtues of his uncle's wedding gift," said Drysdale.

"His uncle's wedding gift?" echoed Gwillam wonderingly.

"Did you never hear of it?" asked Drysdale. "It was quite a subject of conversation at one time. Everyone knew of it and laughed. It was a very strange gift and it was given by a very strange old gentleman. He is dead now, but I can imagine him, if he has any knowledge of what has taken place, grinning with the keenest delight. It is just the sort of thing he would have enjoyed.

¹ Copyright, by Courtland H. Young

"It really began," said Drysdale, "at Craig's wedding breakfast. You see, old Forsythe—Craig's uncle—was delighted at Craig's marriage. He—Forsythe—was old even then; he had a great deal more money than anyone needs; and he used to worry dreadfully about what would become of it when he was gone. To be sure he could leave it all to Craig, as he intended to do; but life is short, Craig would die, and then who would get the money? He often wished that Craig had a family of youngsters, upon whom he might settle it, so that for fifty or sixty years at least it would be safe. And when Craig became engaged to marry the old gentleman immediately made a new will and from that time on displayed a joy so open and unrestrained that it was scarcely decent. At the wedding breakfast his glee was almost childish; he became quite garrulous, and it needed constant effort to restrain him from telling stories, which, however humorous they might prove to be, were, even in their beginnings, quite evidently improper. Still, though with some difficulty, he was kept within bounds until he insisted on making a speech. As he rose from his seat, a glass of wine held unsteadily in his trembling old hand, a wicked smile on his thin old lips, a feeling of uneasiness pervaded the company, and it was very generally felt that whatever he might say, it could be very well dispensed with. But no one remonstrated. When one has a relative who is at once very wealthy and very old, it is astonishing how lenient one becomes to his little failings.

"My dear Robert—my dear Amy," began old Forsythe, glancing first at Craig and then at his wife; 'I have already given you your wedding gift as you know.' This was quite true; the old reprobate had given them an extremely substantial check, to which he found it impossible not to make allusion. 'But that was more or less formal—the gift dictated by convention. And I wanted to give you something intimate—something, trifling perhaps, but personal—something so appropriate that it should become part of your lives. For a long time I racked my poor old brains in vain; and then, only yesterday, I had an inspiration—quite an inspiration!' he added fondly.

"Craig and his wife exchanged glances of relief. The

speech would probably pass off without disaster after all.

"'You may remember,' resumed the old gentleman, 'that when I was younger I traveled extensively, but it has probably escaped your minds that I spent much time in Arabia. Nevertheless that is so. I traveled, not with any thought of exploring or attaining scientific results, but for my own pleasure only. In spite of that, or perhaps because of it, I avoided the main routes of travel, and always, so far as was possible, sought remote and primitive regions. It was in such a place that late one afternoon I came upon a romantic little glade, hidden between two ridges of the mountains I was traversing. All around, the country was bleak and barren, but here the grass was of the greenest and the foliage of the freshest; and it needed only a slight investigation to discover that this desirable state of affairs was due to the waters of a little spring which rose from the ground at one end of the glade. The water was remarkably clear and transparent, and over the spring itself was a small structure of stone, which, though half ruined by the passage of time, still bore a very evident resemblance to a miniature temple. My interest was strongly aroused; I scented a story, and I had my guide make inquiry of the villagers. I was right; there was a story and one which interested me greatly. For at that time I was still young and, though it is I who say it, not without attraction for the ladies; and I still entertained hopes that some day I would know those joys and delights that have come to my lucky young nephew. So I got from my baggage an old crystal flask, which I had picked up in Bassorah, and filled it from the spring; my guide produced an aromatic gum which he was in the habit of burning for the enjoyment of its odor, and we hermetically sealed the flask, which from that day to this I have always preserved most carefully. The day is long past, however, when it can be of use to me, whereas the time has only just begun, my dear Robert and my dear Amy, when it can be of use to you. So it is this flask, my dears, which I have chosen as my real gift to you.'

"He fumbled beneath the flowers and ferns which covered the table before him, and from its hiding-place produced something which he held high in his hand that

all might see. It was a flask of crystal, long, slender and delicately fashioned, and filled to the very stopper with a liquid which, though colorless and transparent, seemed in the blazing light to sparkle and give forth faint iridescent gleams. It was a beautiful thing, and Craig's wife gave a little exclamation of delight as the old gentleman bowed courteously and handed it to her.

"'But Uncle Robert,' she reminded him, as she took it, 'the story? You said there was a story.'

"'Oh, yes, my dear,' replied Uncle Robert, 'you shall have the story, which is most important. For you must know that the spring is a magic spring, and the water in the flask is magic too, with most magical properties. The spring had its origin in the tears of an unfortunate young maiden named Zubaydah, who, on the very spot where it now flows, found the body of her lover Ghanim, cruelly slain. She fell on his breast, lamenting wildly, and when they tore him away from her embracing arms, she would not stir, but remained there, refusing drink and food alike, and weeping, weeping constantly, until in the end she too died. Their story is most pathetic and some day you shall hear it; but now it is of no further importance, save for the fact that when they bore her tenderly away, a spring was flowing from the ground she had so plentifully watered with her tears. And the water of that spring had this remarkable quality: that when a flask of it is jointly possessed by true lovers, so long as neither commits a crime against their mutual love, the water remains as you saw it, clear, sparkling, translucent; but should either of the lovers prove false to the other, the water becomes dark, thick, muddy—an ugly symbol of the wrong that has been done.

"'Always, even when I was quite young,' concluded old Forsythe, 'there was in my nature a strong materialistic strain—a strain of cynicism some said; but to me it seemed rather a strain of common sense, which enabled me to see things as they were, quite uninfluenced by the emotional disturbances which impaired the calm judgments of my fellows. So, though at this time I expected to marry and, of course, expected that my wife would be in love with me when we married, yet I was quite aware that

there could be no guarantee that she would remain so. The value of a flask of this water to a person so able as myself to gaze without blinking upon the realities of life, was very evident. I should present it to my wife on our wedding day and tell her its story; and though I knew it could avail no more than anything else on this earth to keep me her love, yet I hoped that it might serve to guard me against those unpleasant little eccentricities of conduct which sometimes follow the death of conjugal affection. It was with this hope that I always preserved it, and it is with a similar hope on your behalf, my dear Robert, that I have presented you and Amy with the flask.'

"The old gentleman sat down in the midst of a stunned silence. It was, of course, an atrocious thing that he had done. On their very wedding day to suggest that the love of the bridal pair might not last forever! Craig's face was pale and his lips were tightly compressed; on Amy's cheeks burned two angry red spots. But, as I have said before, when one has a relative who is very old and also very wealthy, it is astonishing how lenient one becomes toward his lapses from what one believes to be the correct standards of taste and conduct. Neither Craig nor his wife spoke; the silence lasted yet another moment, then some one made a remark, which, however pointless, at least had the merit of provoking a general conversation, in the course of which old Forsythe and his crudeness were ignored by general consent.

"A little later Craig found his wife upstairs, just as she had donned her traveling dress. Uncle Robert, of course, was not there; and Craig permitted himself to become quite angry. The flask stood sparkling in the sunlight, on a little table where Amy had placed it on coming into the room. Craig would have smashed it to pieces, but Amy stayed his hand.

"'Oh, no,' she said, 'your uncle may ask for it when he comes to see us, and we could not afford to offend him by telling him we had destroyed it.'

"The fact that it was she who saved the flask from destruction, afterwards seemed to Craig a rare bit of irony; but at the time he saw only an early proof of the

wise, semi-maternal interest every good wife takes in her husband's affairs, and he found it so inexpressibly touching that, instead of smashing the flask, he kissed his wife.

"Nevertheless, they did not exhibit old Forsythe's wedding gift conspicuously in their drawing-room, though it was there that they found it greeting them upon returning from their trip. What to do with it was quite a problem until Mrs. Craig found a vacant space behind a row of books in the library, and there it was promptly bestowed. You see, as a hiding-place, this spot had two great virtues: it hid, which is a requisite of all hiding-places, and it allowed the flask to be quickly produced in case of Uncle Robert's visits, which was a requisite of this particular hiding-place.

"After about two years had passed, however, they found that they had lost all sensitiveness upon the subject, and they even, at times, with a decided feeling of being an old married couple, treated the episode humorously for the benefit of their friends. 'Dear Uncle Robert and his quaint idea of an appropriate wedding gift!' They were able to adopt this attitude the more easily, perhaps, because there seemed so little probability that the event, to guard against which Uncle Robert had given them the flask, would ever occur. They were a model couple—Darby and Joan in all respects save that of age, and neither had ever shown the slightest inclination to stray beyond the strictest limits imposed by the matrimonial tether. This in spite of the fact that for two years they had not been separated for twenty-four hours at a time. Or should I say because of it? One can never tell. At any rate, when Uncle Robert died, about this time, he had been entirely forgiven, and they grieved for him quite sincerely.

"Now it happened that the bulk of the estate which the old gentleman had left to Craig and any possible children, was stock in a rubber concession in two of the smaller South American states; and it also happened that just after Forsythe's death, acute trouble began to develop between the two countries. After several weeks of great anxiety, Craig felt that he had no choice, but must go and defend his interests in person. Accordingly, he immediately

began his preparations for the trip. Mrs. Craig desired earnestly to go with him, but of this he would not hear.

"‘I shall not be gone over two months at the most,’ he said, ‘and that is not really such a long time. Besides, there will be danger for you if it comes to hostilities; and there is always fever.’

"In the end Mrs. Craig was persuaded to stay at home, and Craig went alone. On the night before he sailed he had an inspiration. He was in the library, disposing of some odds and ends of his affairs, when the inspiration came to him. He went to the bookshelves, pushed aside some books and took out the crystal flask. For a moment he held it in the light of the reading lamp, admiring the lustre of the delicate glass and the clear transparency of the liquid it contained. A smile curved his lips, and he held the neck of the flask over the flame of the lamp until the sealing gum was softened, then removed the stopper, poured out part of the contents and refilled the flask with ink. When he had replaced the stopper, he again held the flask to the light, but now the liquid it contained was a dirty, muddy gray—the color he wished. He smiled again in satisfaction, and returned the flask to its old place on the bookshelf.

"You see, he had conceived the idea of an excellent joke upon his wife. She would in all probability discover the flask at some time during his absence; she would realize immediately what he had done; and he could imagine her laughing with him across the thousand miles that separated them. And what a finish it would make to their story! Perhaps, too, she would play up to the situation by pretending to take her discovery seriously. The affair was full of humorous possibilities, and he amused himself greatly in anticipating them.

"But the absence which was to have extended over not more than two months, as a matter of fact, lasted for a little more than a year. During all this time it was never certain that Craig would not be able to return almost immediately; there was therefore no reason for his wife to join him, and she remained at home—alone.

"Upon what must have happened I can only touch lightly, because I cannot understand it. Mrs. Craig was

alone, it is true, but her husband loved her; and when he left, she had undoubtedly cared for him. Of course, with the sudden increase in Craig's income, she was thrown with a set she had never met before; she and Craig had not been poor, but this change meant wealth, really great wealth, and perhaps it turned her head. Perhaps, being as strangely illogical and as strongly resentful of fancied slights as women always are in matters which concern their affections, she had convinced herself that Craig need never have stayed from her so long, if his inclination and his duty had not traveled along the same road, and in her anger sought for revenge. Perhaps . . . but I do not know. One can never tell.

"When at last Craig returned home, however, she greeted him with manifestations of greatest pleasure; and Craig himself, when I met him on the street two days after his arrival, seemed radiantly happy. He had reason to be; he had wealth, occupation, strength and the love of the woman whom he loved. He probably thought himself, and he certainly seemed to me, one of the favored ones of the world.

"It was in all probability on the evening of this day that he first thought of the flask, and then it dawned on him quite suddenly that his wife had not spoken of it. His joke, of course, had failed, because if she had seen the flask during his absence, he would long since have heard something of it. Still, he would get it out and make what he could of the change that had come over it.

"'Amy,' he said, 'we have forgotten to look at the flask.' He watched her closely, but her face did not change. She did not even show the slight surprise that might have been expected at his sudden introduction of the subject.

"'So we have,' she answered. She smiled slightly. 'If you think an inspection necessary, will you get it?' She was so ready that it seemed almost as if she had been waiting for his suggestion; but he did not notice this—at the time.

"He walked across the room, already smiling as he thought of the surprise in store for her. Still smiling he reached down into the vacant space behind the books until

he found the flask, then turned and held it to the light. . . .

"That was a year ago.

"The next day Craig went to Canada. He did not return until his wife had sailed for Europe. She is still there, and Craig is—as you saw him."

Drysdale stopped.

"But what was the matter? What was wrong?" exclaimed young Gwillam. "What—"

Drysdale interrupted him.

"You see," he said, "when he looked at the flask that night, it had once more been filled with a perfectly clear and transparent liquid."

WHY THE EDITORS BUY

ADVENTURE

AS *Adventure* readers include the cultured and critical as well as those of simple tastes, we seek the kind of workmanship that will stand the difficult test of meeting the approval of both groups. But in selecting our fiction it always seems to us that only that part of the story is effective that reaches the reader's mind and the highest literary attainment is likely to go hand in hand with simplicity and clearness.

We regard it as vitally important that the illusion should be kept up. We want the reader to leave his own world and to live entirely in the world of the story. For this reason we dislike too pronounced mannerisms of style, too unusual names for characters, misstatements in local color, improbability in plot details. We also wish that the author would avoid the obtrusion of his own personality into the story, too much surface cleverness, the specific call upon the reader to philosophize (thus making him think, rather than keeping him in the receptive mood), a too cynical or sophisticated attitude on the author's part. In general the two points—clearness and keeping the illusion—are probably those which we emphasize most particularly. We have in addition certain types of story that we try to avoid:—those that involve international or political questions; we dislike stories of opium smuggling; stories in which *all* of the main characters are “natives”; stories which feature intermarriage. Generally speaking, we do not care much for a villain in the rôle of central character; nor for much high society atmosphere; millionaire circles; prisons; slums; lost wills; psychopathic cases; gangsters. Of course exceptions to all of the above sometimes force themselves upon us by sheer merit.

We do not insist upon the accepted idea of the “happy ending” but we prefer stories that uplift rather than depress. We consider only the net effect of the story on the reader for the man or woman who is reading a magazine, is doing so, primarily with the idea of enjoying or relaxing, not to be made uncomfortable or unhappy. However, a story to sell to *Adventure* need not be artificially shaped. We are looking for stories that will please our readers and the range of selection is wide indeed.

ARTHUR S. HOFFMAN.

Adventure.

THE RIDGEWAY COMPANY, Publishers,
Spring and Macdougal Streets,
New York City.

THE AMERICAN MAGAZINE

IN buying a story for *The American Magazine* I have four leading questions in mind:

1. Is it interesting?
2. Is it true?
3. Does it add to our store of knowledge of human nature?
4. Is there a lift to it?

Not all four requirements are always met in the stories I take but they are the main guide-posts. Let me take these questions in their order and be more detailed and explicit concerning each one.

If a story isn't interesting, or has a very limited field of interest, no matter how well written it is, I cannot use it in *The American Magazine*. And the interest must not be sporadic, it must be cumulative in its effect. A story should grip the reader's attention at the beginning and hold it steadily all the way through. Good progressive writing is far more effective than that which contains a number of thrills linked together by long, arid paragraphs.

In asking myself—is it true?—I do not intend to convey the meaning that I am looking for stories of real happenings. As a matter of fact, I am of the opinion that fiction doesn't dare be as wild and exciting as real life. As Byron wisely said, "Truth is always strange—stranger than fiction." Consequently I look for stories that *ring* true, the characters in which have their counterparts in everyday life or are so vividly created by the writer that they are accepted by the reader as natural, even if unusual, human beings. In the making of a plot I want sanity enthroned, the believable things of life depicted; not cock and bull fakes, which although they may create momentary excitement will cause the reader to lay the story down and say, "It's all right, but it's highly colored and far-fetched." I would infinitely rather have less excitement, fewer dramatic pyrotechnics and have the reader slap his knee and exclaim, "Can you beat that for the real thing!" I want him to corroborate and testify to the convincingness and obvious truth of the story out of his own experiences and observations or through the instinctive acceptance of it by his imagination.

I hope, however, from the foregoing words writers will not run away with the idea that so long as the characters are life-like a story will get across. The ideal story for this magazine

is one that has a convincing plot as well as convincing characters. But I would rather sacrifice plot to characterization any day of the week. If a story comes into the office slender of plot but brimful of human wisdom and accurate character work, I buy it. As a matter of fact, some of the most successful stories I have published have been of this type. I do not, however, buy a story that is strong on plot if the characters are overdrawn or unnatural and it has an atmosphere of unreality.

This brings me to my third question: "Does it add to our store of knowledge of human nature?" If the people in a story are natural, if they meet problems with sense of humor, if their actions are interestingly sane and normal, and the story presents news of human nature wisely and accurately, the reader can scarcely avoid learning something to his advantage. His sympathy and imagination are going to be aroused and quickened only by stories that are probable in both character and plot, because they alone will give him a true slant on human nature and add to his understanding of it.

In commenting on the last question, I feel I cannot too strongly emphasize the need of the quality which I define as "lift." A story may be surpassingly true, the characterization good, the plot well thought out, but if it does not stir the emotion, if it doesn't make the reader feel better, I am not keen for it. I want cheerful stories that leave a sense of satisfaction in their wake—stories that are full of warmth, charm, friendliness, and right living. Highly colored, far-fetched or gloomy fiction may interest for a moment, but it will not yield genuine and lasting pleasure. I avoid unpleasantly tragic and morbid stories, no matter how well written, because they usually leave a distinct effect of depression. The reader has to recover from them; climb painfully back to a normal belief in human kind. I must have stories that touch the heart as well as appeal to the intellect. They must satisfy the reader and leave him with the feeling of time well spent.

In dividing my answer to your question into definite heads I see that these overlap each other and that consequently my explanations do the same in a measure. But at least they are not contradictory, and I hope the cumulative effect makes my practice clear. You realize much must be left out of an attempt to set down briefly an editorial policy relating to so wide and varied a literary field as that of fiction.

JOHN M. SIDDALL.

The American Magazine.
THE CROWELL PUBLISHING CO.,
381 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

THE AMERICAN BOY

THE *American Boy* aims to interest and help boys between the ages of twelve and twenty, recognizing the fact that to be helpful to the boy it is necessary first to secure his interest and command his attention. Stories and articles should be of such literary quality as will inculcate the best literary standards in the boy reader, as well as interest him and have an effective message. The atmosphere must be wholesome, alive, vigorous, and inspiring, and stories should be a force for good, not repelling the boy reader by too obvious moralizing, but implying the moral by the characters and the action. The magazine endeavors to put before its boys, through the medium of stories, boy heroes who can set them fine examples; in business stories, it endeavors to inculcate the principles of good business; in athletic stories, it sets forth high athletic ideals.

The *American Boy* is always particularly careful in the presentation of facts. Stories and articles should always teach truth. Fiction stories, of course, need not be true stories—stories of actual facts—but they should give accurate pictures of the phases of life they are representing; they should not misrepresent the facts of geography, natural science, history, business, or human relationships. Writers who get into the *American Boy* are those who have a story to tell—a point to make—that is worth while; a story of daring which provides a hero (always demanded by boys); a story of adventure that satisfies the boy's natural longing to roam; a story of an exciting game which, enthralling the boy, makes clear to him what is right and what is wrong; a story of service that will aid the boy to adjust himself to social life; a story of business that will give the boy a true impression of the workaday world he is to enter. Material with a strong feminine element is not used in the *American Boy*; nor is "little kid" material. The average age of *American Boy* readers is sixteen; and boys of that age are interested in the doings, not of boys younger than themselves, but of boys their own age, or older, and of men.

Something to be borne in mind by those who essay to write for a boys' magazine is the distinct difference between stories of boys and stories for boys. The story of boys is particularly popular just now in adult magazines. It tells of a boy from the adult viewpoint. To the adult, what the boy does is often distinctly humorous. To the boy it is serious business, and he would be properly offended should one poke fun at him in his

own magazine. The story for boys must be handled from the boy viewpoint, not from the adult viewpoint. This does not mean that the story should be "written down"—quite the reverse. Once having grasped the boy viewpoint and secured the proper angle, the writer should use the same style and diction as in handling the story of similar sort for the ordinary adult publication.

The story for boys need not necessarily be a story of boys. True, a boy is more likely to be interested in a story with a boy hero than in a story of an adult hero. The magazine wishes to place before its readers fictional characters whom the boy may emulate. It is such characters which arouse his enthusiasm.

WALTER P. MCGUIRE.

The American Boy.
Detroit, Michigan.

ARGOSY-ALLSTORY WEEKLY

WHY are manuscripts rejected? "Why is a mouse when it spins?" Perhaps the reply to the ancient wheeze, "Because the higher the fewer," is as satisfactory an answer to the first question as any. There are so *many* reasons, in fact; so many varied and diverse considerations that enter into the acceptance or rejection of a manuscript that a direct and concise answer is impossible. Wholly aside from the merit of the story there is the question of the editorial, business, political, and religious policy of the magazine; the quantity and character of the material on hand; the length of the story which exigencies of make-up may make impossible for that particular magazine, at that particular time, and a dozen other considerations, varying with each publication and of which the author is quite unconscious.

Generally speaking however 90 per cent of manuscripts are rejected because they fail to grip the interest in the first few pages. It might be remembered that the editor in his official capacity is not an analyst or critic. He is first and foremost a *buyer*; and moreover a buyer of comparatively small quantities picked from an enormous mass of material in a limited time. It would be a total impossibility for him to read and weigh in its entirety every manuscript that comes before him. Also it is unnecessary. One doesn't have to eat the whole of the egg to

discover it is passé. He is a buyer and he knows, or is supposed to, the tastes and desires of his principal—that is to say the particular fraction of the general public to which his particular periodical caters—he knows what they want and it is from that point of view that he reads. It is his job and his joy to supply his readers not only with what they want but with the *best* of what they want, and, if authors would only believe it, there is more rejoicing in the editorial heaven over one new writer of promise than over the ninety and nine who have already arrived.

An editor is not an incompetent ass because he rejects for his adventure magazine a story that later is snapped up by the *Century* or *Atlantic*, although authors are apt to chortle gleefully over such a contretemps; nor is there any truth in the oft repeated rumors—propagated by the failures—of a cabal to suppress budding genius, and a clique of editors to guard the Olympian heights from all but those bearing the stamp of approval of their masters. As a matter of fact if an author after real and conscientious effort fails to sell it is either because his stuff does not measure up to standard or because he is persistently peddling to the wrong market. You can't sell the finest line of fancy flower pots to a fish-dealer.

It is this latter point that should be stressed especially. Far too many really able authors fail to understand the value of a thorough knowledge of the market. Most of them haven't even a general knowledge of it; do not think of it at all. To them a magazine is a magazine. Their attitude is "You publish stories, Why not mine?" and they send a beautifully written and wholly plotless character sketch to a publication using only rapid fire adventure stuff and a charming little New England pastoral to one of the magazines devoted wholly to sex topics, and then wonder why they come back.

Perhaps speaking broadly it is this ignorance of market that accounts for at least a large percentage of the rejections that afflict authors (aside from the vast army of amateurs, novices and hopeless incompetents) whose work is really good.

ELLIOT BAILESTIER.

Argosy-Allstory Weekly.
THE FRANK A. MUNSEY CO.,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

THE ATLANTIC MONTHLY

IT really would not serve your purpose if I were to write you about my principles of accepting stories. They are too capricious, and would only tend to lower the feelings of respect which you are inculcating in your readers.

Quite seriously, my selection is made according to the whim of one individual.

ELLERY SEDGWICK.

The Atlantic Monthly.
8 Arlington Street,
Boston, Mass.

THE CENTURY MAGAZINE

WHEN you ask me what kind of stories we want for *The Century*, I am puzzled about answering, for the truth is we like almost all kinds, provided they are done with distinction. I think I may speak for the editorial staff when I say that distinction is the mark at which we are aiming.

The Century is a family magazine, edited for the mature members of the family. Every one who reads the magazine knows that we welcome new writers. Indeed, it is a day of rejoicing when the mail yields a story of real promise by an unknown writer.

We do not want war stories, for the public is tired of war-fiction; nor "machine-made" stories, the cheap clap-trap that has nothing to recommend it but facility.

For myself, I have a confession to make. It is this: "I do not know much about art, but I know what I like!" I am aware that the knowing will look askance upon this avowal of the Philistine, but it is a good creed and wears well. And I believe that the editor who pleases himself in the selection of manuscripts stands a better chance of pleasing others than he who guesses at the tastes of a fickle general public whom he fancies as remote from himself in their likings as a race of Martians.

Simplicity and Sincerity are the true gods in art as in life; of that I am sure.

You ask me to mention several short stories published in *The Century* within four or five years that we like particularly and to tell you why. I think first of "The Friends," by Stacy Aumonier, printed in October, 1915. This story is an unplotted, realistic study of two drunkards, friends whose only bond was drink. It is perhaps the most powerful prohibition tract ever published and not a word of prohibition in it! An analysis of Aumonier's work—any bit of it—will reveal a sureness of touch which is a refreshment to the soul. Some of his stories are finer than others, of course, but like Phyllis Bottome and Anne Douglas Sedgwick, there is always distinction about his work.

Some of the critics were good enough to call "The Friends" the best story published in any magazine that year. To me, besides my admiration for it as an artistic creation, it stands for two things: one, an example of an interesting phenomenon,—Mr. Aumonier was a man in middle life, I am told, when he began writing, and evidently found a beautiful and finished technique in his pocket!—the other, a warning never to judge a story by what it is not. It would be fatally easy to write "no plot" across such a manuscript and lose it forever.

"A Source of Irritation," also by Stacy Aumonier, published in *The Century* for January, 1918, is a delicious bit of humor to my way of thinking. It is pleasant to know that Aumonier's many-sided mind has humor and gaiety, too, in its composition.

"The Wedding Jest" and "Porcelain Cups" by James Branch Cabell, printed in September, 1919, and November, 1919 seem to me very lovely. In the stodge of every-day literary expression, such delicacy and grace are rare indeed. These stories are remarkable for that almost obsolete quality, "style."

"The Fat of the Land," by Anzia Yeszierska, a study of the Russian Jew in America and the reaction of the older generation to the loud prosperities of the younger, is excellent work, full of the intangible quality of race and keen in its psychology. It was published in *The Century* for August, 1919.

One wishes to mention, too, the black magic of "The Black Key," by Joseph Hergesheimer, the rich embroideries of H. G. Dwight and Achmed Abdullah, the bold portraiture of Harvey O'Higgins, the subtly fine work of Marjory Morten. Also that exquisite study of innocence, "Red and White," by Roland Pertwee; and Myla Jo Closser's dog-story, "At the Gate."

It is impossible for any magazine to sustain regularly the level of its best fiction, for the simple reason that such stories do not happen frequently—would there were more of them! Those I have mentioned are among the best, in my judgment, that *The Century* has published for several years, and it is towards work of such character that we are aiming.

I take it, dear Miss Wick, that you have asked me to characterize some of our most cherished stories in order to show by concrete examples the kind of fiction *The Century* wants; and I believe that you are right in thinking this plan the best way of saying it.

Sincerely yours,

ANNE STODDARD.

The Century Magazine.
353 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

COLLIER'S, THE NATIONAL WEEKLY

WHEN a writer wants to please an editor, the surest way is to forget all about him. The editor is not reading the story for his own entertainment. He reads with only one idea in mind: "Will this story appeal to all kinds of people? Is it a good story?"

An editor of a magazine of general circulation seldom seeks one particular kind of story. He wants the best stories written. The quickest way to his favor is to write them.

There are no set rules for accomplishing this. Only a few landmarks are on the road. Know your subject. Have something to tell. Be sure that something happens in the story.

If nothing happens, if there is no action, you have perhaps written a very good essay or a very convincing argument—but you will not be able to sell it as a short story.

Remember that you are writing a short story, not a condensed novel. A short story, once started, has only one object—to end as quickly as possible.

There are only two people who can infallibly detect padding in a story. One is yourself. The other is the reader.

It pays, always, to be clean. A questionable story will attract many people—but it will repel more.

Few writers succeed in being convincing when they wander into fields they don't know. Every man collects a mass of information concerning the road over which he has traveled, and the people he met on the way. Use this information. It will furnish all the short stories you can ever write.

Just as people strive for "happy endings" in their own affairs,

so they like them in stories which they read for entertainment.

The enduring themes for short stories are the enduring themes in life itself; the old copybook virtues, like self-sacrifice, courage, generosity, resourcefulness and faith.

The writer succeeds in proportion as he makes his reader eager for another story by him. Editors have ways to judge this reaction. Forget the editor, and what you think he wants. Write directly to the man or woman who is going to buy the magazine and read your story.

HARFORD POWELL, JR.

Collier's, The National Weekly.
416 West 13th Street,
New York City.

AINSLIE'S MAGAZINE

AINSLIE'S publishes yearly a total of approximately a hundred and twenty short stories (from 5,000 to 8,000 words in length), twelve novelettes (from 20,000 to 30,000) and, in monthly installments, about four serials (from 50,000 to 70,000). And, to cull this relatively small amount of fiction, innumerable manuscripts are painstakingly gone over. At a rough estimate, erring on the side of too few rather than too many, ten thousand manuscripts are submitted yearly from various sources for consideration by *Ainslee's Magazine*. Of these, eight thousand, I should say, are absolutely unsuited to publication anywhere, while the remaining number are perhaps creditable enough, but have been sent by their authors or the authors' agents to the wrong magazine—which brings me to the registering of a simple, but curiously disregarded, bit of advice to those whose goal is writing for magazine publication. *Study the magazine to which you contemplate submitting material.* After all, each issue of a magazine, whatsoever its character, represents the nearest approach to their ideal for the publication, which the editors have been able, at the time to achieve, and should therefore constitute a fairly good working pattern for those whose stuff is to be "aimed at" that magazine. A rejection slip from a given publication is just as apt to mean that the story, albeit distinctive, does not fit the special needs of the magazine as to indicate total unfittedness for publication anywhere.

Ainslee's Magazine aims to be a high-class, clean, distinctive fiction magazine. It has no room for, nor time for, the frankly salacious, or "sexy." It is looking always for the proverbial

good story, well told. That story may move around any clean, healthy, up-to-date theme, but it should have in it, preferably, woman and love interest. The people of the story should be human, not wooden. They should talk like you and I talk, not like Maria Edgeworth's people "conversed." And the tale itself must be colorful. If a story is to have any holding quality whatever, it must transfer its readers to the scene of the action. And to do this, the thing must have in it real atmosphere. Plot basis, then, along with good characterization, atmosphere, and love and woman interest are essentials for the typical *Ainslee's* story.

We like to think that stories in *Ainslee's Magazine*, though varied in character, are uniformly good. We hesitate, therefore, to talk of "better and best." But, by way of illustration of the points we have sought to make, we call attention to Marie Van Vorst's "The Week-End Guest" in the December issue of *Ainslee's*—a good story on all counts, and well suited to *Ainslee's*.

HELEN L. LIEDER.

Ainslee's Magazine,
STREET & SMITH CORPORATION,
Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street,
New York City.

COSMOPOLITAN MAGAZINE

THE first essential for editing a popular magazine for Americans is that the editor be a sane, normal, every-day American. No mystical genius is required.

He is merchandising a commodity to the American public. If his taste is the taste of the average American, and he puts within the covers of a magazine stories which he has enjoyed reading, other Americans of similar taste in reading will buy his magazine in quantities sufficient to make it a success.

At least, that is the theory I have followed. I know quite well that I am no genius, yet I have seen magazines grow under my direction. And I have no rule for buying a story except that it must be sufficiently interesting and sufficiently well told to interest me.

All sorts of stories interest me. Some time ago, for the satisfaction of a friend of mine, I named the ten short stories which I had liked best of all those I had published. It was interesting even to me to see how they varied. The ten stories were: BACK PAY by Fannie Hurst; HASSAYAMPA JIM by Peter B.

Kyne; KAZAN by James Oliver Curwood; THE STORY I CAN'T WRITE by Rupert Hughes; THE LAST ADVENTURE by Frank R. Adams; BOSTON BLACKIE'S MARY by Jack Boyle; THE JUGGLER by Arthur Springer; THE SNIDE by Harris Merton Lyon; THE GHOST'S STORY by Basil King; THE DUMMY CHUCKER by Arthur Somers Roche. That's about as catholic a list as I can imagine.

"Back Pay," "The Snide" and "The Last Adventure" might be classified as "sex" stories, although I dislike that term. "The Story I Can't Write" was a trick story; "Boston Blackie's Mary" was a prison story; "Hassayampa Jim" was a Western story; "The Dummy Chucker" was an O'Henry-ish bit of writing; "Kazan" was a dog story; "The Ghost's Story" was a story of the supernatural (it was the story from which Mr. King later built his photoplay "Earthbound"); "The Juggler" was a character study with an extraordinary twist in the ending.

No two of these stories in any way resembled each other. I suppose that's because I believe in variety, not because of any rule that variety makes a good magazine, but because my taste in reading varies. I am likely this evening to read Cellini for relaxation; tomorrow evening to read Mark Twain, the following evening to read De Maupassant. I like each one of them while I am reading him, but I don't want too much of any one of them.

That probably is true of the average reader of American magazines. He has his favorite authors but he doesn't want too much of any of them. I think Peter B. Kyne, James Oliver Curwood, Fannie Hurst, Ben Ames Williams, and Frank R. Adams are doing the best work of any magazine writers of to-day, but I feel quite sure that a magazine filled with their work and only their work, month after month, would become a bore.

Each one of these writers is a friend of mine; yet, I am quite sure, neither they nor I would enjoy talking together every evening for a year. I find that I am the average American in virtually everything; that I like what he likes without stopping to find out why; and I believe, too, that there is no reading too good for the American public—that there is nothing real and worth while that is "over his head."

RAY LONG.

Cosmopolitan.
Good Housekeeping.
Harper's Bazar.
Hearst's Magazine.
 119 West 40th Street,
 New York City.

THE COUNTRY GENTLEMAN

THE *Country Gentleman* addresses a class of readers whose interests are keyed to country life and the industry of agriculture. This field is big enough to include more than half of the nation's population. Our editorial problem is not one of tying in narrowly to scientific discussions of only the growing phases of farming but ranges throughout the innumerable business and social problems of the American country-side. It is our aim to discuss everything that should help to broaden the farmer's vision of his own problems and also of all inter-related problems that help to make him a vital factor as a citizen of the United States.

In presenting fiction, we aim, so far as possible, to confine the themes to country life and the open spaces of the world outdoors. We eschew jazzily up-to-date urbanized fiction, sex novels, the eternal triangle and the purely psychologic story. Naturally we will always give a preference to fiction related to farming by first-class writers who are thoroughly familiar with farming.

It is our feeling that the American farmer is interested in everything that has any contact with country life. Hunting and fishing and outdoor adventure are his life-long sports. He has a deep and genuine affection for animals that serve him. He manifests a very live interest in stories that deal with his marketing problems, and his ever-pressing problem of financing his business. He has an alert interest in his schools, his newspapers, in local, state and national government. He enjoys character studies and has a vastly sharper sense of humor than he is commonly credited with. Likewise he is a shrewd critic and quickly resents the sort of attempted slurs that are so frequently made upon rural folk by those who are wholly ignorant of farming.

We feel justified in being guided by several successful experiments we have made with our fiction. We persuaded Mr. Freeman Tilden, who is a farmer himself and thoroughly familiar with all phases of agriculture, to create a character in Old Man Crabtree who might be defined as "a Wallingford baiter." Mr. Crabtree is a shrewd retired country banker. His experience had taught him all the tricks of "high finance" and he was always on the lookout for the specialists in shoddy and sham when they came to town. In the climax the skimmers were invariably neatly flayed by Old Man Crabtree. These stories of Mr. Tilden were real and drew in a continuous flow of favorable comment.

Zane Grey has always been able to strike a responsive chord with the lovers of outdoor life, of whom the American farmer is undoubtedly in the majority. They like his descriptions of the frontier as it was in the 70's and they seem to be keen for his vigorous characters, notwithstanding how strenuous.

We like good dog stories of the sort Albert Payson Terhune has been writing for us. And we like small town stories when they are as good as those Tom P. Morgan is writing; but then, Tom Morgan lived these stories for fifty years before he began to write them.

The great majority of our contributors have specialized in some agricultural pursuit. Many of them are living on their farms and conducting them as successful business enterprises. We number among our most valued contributors the heads of leading agricultural colleges, federal and state government experts, graduates of agricultural colleges who are now devoting all their time to writing, county agricultural agents, engineers who are specializing in agricultural mechanics and so on. Among them are such well-known men as Eugene Davenport, Dean of the Illinois College of Agriculture, Herbert Quick, until recently a member of the Federal Farm Loan Board, Frank A. Waugh, Professor of Horticulture, Massachusetts College of Agriculture, E. V. Wilcox and J. Sidney Cates, for many years employed as farm management experts by the United States Department of Agriculture, and P. S. Lovejoy, Professor of Forestry, University of Michigan.

Such writers as I have described above supply the bulk of the contents of *The Country Gentleman* and consequently to preserve a balanced ration, as a livestock feeder would say, we try our utmost to obtain the sort of fiction that will round out the ensemble.

BARTON W. CURRIE.

The Country Gentleman.
CURTIS PUBLISHING Co.,
Independence Square,
Philadelphia, Pa.

THE DELINEATOR

WE *Delineator* editors think that we know a good story when we see it; *vide* the magazine. Yet no issue of the magazine, and perhaps no six issues, contain all the types of good stories that we like.

The average intelligent American woman or girl, in the home or in business, is the person we have chiefly in mind when choosing stories. The above-the-average woman, of course, is not forgotten.

Nor do we exclude any special type of story. We prefer stories that will interest everyone—men, women and high-brows—but we want stories for women first. Other things being equal, the hero should be a woman. We think we have no prejudices and we certainly have no rules.

JAMES E. TOWER.

The Delineator.

THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING CO.,
Spring and Macdougall Streets,
New York City.

THE DESIGNER

BOTH Arthur Tomalin, the editor, and Emily R. Burt, his assistant, felt hesitant to express their ideas on what constituted a good and therefore a desirable story for *The Designer*. They both made much of the fact that a story to appeal to women readers should mirror life as it is, and as it daily affects the great body of both men and women who are seeking to weather its problems and complexities. Sympathy and understanding are perhaps the two qualities upon which they put greatest stress.

The Designer.

THE BUTTERICK PUBLISHING CO.
12 Vandam Street,
New York City.

THE DIAL

I DO NOT believe it is possible to formulate any laws in accordance with which one can judge the merit of fiction any more than it is possible to formulate such laws for the judgment of any other æsthetic object. In deciding whether or not we accept for publication in *The Dial* a story submitted to us we are guided almost wholly by the intensity of the impression made upon us by that story. Of course the means by which the author attains this intensity are very varied and of course each manner of attack presupposes its own technique. However, it would be inappropriate for me in this letter to endeavour to sketch out my personal opinion of what would be the technique of any particular type of story.

But of course all stories, whatever their character, depend in part for their intensity upon the delicacy of the writer's perception of verbal values as well as upon the delicacy of his perception of character and environment. And of course prose rhythms are quite as important as those in verse.

Perhaps I might add that my personal feeling is that dialogue is much over-done in American fiction of to-day and that the best writers depend upon it merely to relieve pure narrative.

I regard fiction as quite as pure an art as poetry or as music and therefore give no preference to one story because it delineates real life rather than Ultima Thule.

I am sorry I am not able to go into the subject more thoroughly and more satisfactorily.

SCOTFIELD THAYER.

The Dial.
152 West 13th Street.
New York City.

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE

DETECTIVE STORY MAGAZINE is a weekly publication. It is therefore a large market, and is constantly in need of short stories of 2,500 to 6,000 or 7,000 words, novelettes of 12,000 or 15,000, and novels of 25,000 words. Serials should run from 36,000 to 100,000 words in length, and break up approximately in about 12,000 word installments.

It most not be deduced that only detective stories are needed for this publication. When one speaks of a detective story we think of a narrative which begins with the murder of somebody, the police being called in, and then the efforts of the police or the efforts of some wise investigator of crime to solve the mystery of who killed the deceased. Of course, this story with variations—if it is well done—is always acceptable. While we are dealing with it we might say that, in general, such stories are divided into two types, one in which the method is the predominating theme, and the other in which the motive is played up prominently. The first type of story suggests the puzzle. There is always a type of mind which revels in puzzles. A person mysteriously disappears from a room, and after wading through 60,000 or 70,000 words, mostly questions and answers, we learn that the method of removing the body was through, we will say, the fireplace, which was on hinges. Of course, this is the easiest type of detective story to write, and, as is quite obvious, it is written backwards. We mean by that, an author first evolves an ingenious method of killing some one, or of removing some one, and then builds about this a story, leaving the disclosure of the method of killing or removal to the end of the story. We think a far better way to do this story, and a way that interests more people, is to have the motive the predominating feature. The method by which, we will say, a young woman disappears, either through her own efforts or through the efforts of others, is interesting enough in its way, but that which interests the public generally, and her friends in particular, is not how she disappeared, so much as why she disappeared.

Now to take up the other types of stories that *Detective Story Magazine* is interested in: We are glad to consider any story into which crime enters. When one stops to consider a moment, one must realize how important a feature crime is in the life of every person. In using the word crime, we mean deception in any form. All persons constantly resort to some types of deception. Thus the crime story, so called, lends itself to an infinite variety of situations from the Atlantic to the Pacific. For instance, in almost every family there is the urge for money, in many for the bare necessities of life, while in others simply for more luxury. Thus hundreds of thousands of persons are being sorely tempted every day to deceive. The stories of their temptations cannot help, if well told, but be interesting. Above all things in a detective story or a crime story, the narrative must get on, move along. While character work is much desired, it is demanded that this type of story have suspense and be written in such a way that one is urged on

from page to page to see what is going to happen next. While this can be accomplished without dramatic situations and unexpected happenings occurring every so often, it is usually found necessary to resort to these methods for keeping up interest. Authors must not fall into the common mistake, however, of feeling that when we say a story should get on we simply mean that there should be action, physical movement in it. Running up and down stairs alone does not make for excitement, but very often does make for confusion. Also, saying that people are excited or nervous or in fear does not interest the reader very much. The author must show by the actions of his characters that they are excited or frightened. A crime story, then, is one which gets on, has plenty of strong situations, and in which the motive, conflict, is the dominating feature. It is, perhaps, needless to add that in a crime story the author must be fair to his readers—that is, he must not explain the mystery by introducing a reason for the commission of the crime of which the reader has not been made aware.

F. E. BLACKWELL.

Detective Story Magazine.
STREET AND SMITH,
79 Seventh Avenue,
New York City.

EVERYBODY'S MAGAZINE

THAT word "Everybody's" is the watchword of *Everybody's* fiction. And what it means is simply that in choosing stories the editors of *Everybody's* bear in mind an audience of "regular folks," with a large variety of tastes and with tastes for different things at different times. We are not thinking specifically of business men. Nor specifically of professional men. Nor of women merely as club members. Nor of women merely as housewives. We are thinking of the splendid average of folks, with normal human interests and normal human emotions. And we take stories with a view to offering in each number a well-balanced ration of these interests and emotions, stories of love, adventure, business, sentiment, children, humor, sport; of city and country; of rich and poor.

The only types of stories that are barred are those that lack wide contact with the average human experience—that depict fantastic or morbid or unreal motives or isolated emotional reactions. This does not necessarily bar an occasional use of

morbid experience, soundly based—such as “The Wrists on the Door,” by Horace Fish, a horror story, strange and fantastic in atmosphere, with a big truth at the bottom of it.

It is our guess that the largest group of people reads for sheer entertainment, and with two motives—unconscious, perhaps; either to gain a heightened sense of their own situations, their own personalities through reading stories of their own sort of life; or to be transported by reading as by magic from their own environment into another world. And we have a notion that, as the worry and perplexity of life increase, the eagerness to *gain escape* through reading increases too. That is why *Everybody's* has stressed stories of adventurous action—such as Charles Saxby's “In Camera,” Clarence B. Kelland's “Cheese in the Trap,” David Churchill's “Igor's Trail,” Edison Marshall's “The Elephant Remembers.” That is the reason for an intensification of the search for humor—for Dorothy De Jagers' cheerful New York stories and for Samuel Hopkins Adams' “Cab Sir?” reprinted in this volume as a story on which *Everybody's* readers expressed themselves with cordial approval.

At the same time—paradoxical as it may seem—*Everybody's* has not barred war stories. We do not believe it is possible to ask real writers to shut the doors on the most tremendous experience of their lives—and still do their best work. We hold a high standard for war stories, but the story itself is the test and such a piece of work as James Hopper's “The Scoop of Charles Hamilton Potts” goes over as easily as a love idyl.

As for length, there is no rigid requirement. Short stories are preferred, in order to make possible the maximum of variety in each number, but ten thousand words won't kill a story of our sort that is worth—ten thousand words.

Cleanness is a requisite—cleanness without priggishness or sentimental dishonesty; open-eyed wholesomeness that strengthens one's faith in human nature.

VIRGINIA RODERICK.

Everybody's Magazine.
Spring and Macdougall Streets,
New York City.

FARM AND FIRESIDE

WE want good fiction for *Farm and Fireside*, and we will pay good money for it. The only kind we don't want is the extreme stuff—sexy-pink-tea and blood-and-thunder. We don't demand a farm setting. Aside from that, we have no specifications. Just one request:

If you are not interested in selling your best stories to a publication that is made for men and women who farm, please do not waste your postage and our time.

As to length—3,000 to 5,000 words for short stories, and up to 10,000 for two-part, and 15,000 for three-part serials.

We pay on acceptance, price to fit quality; no limit.

Address Editor, *Farm and Fireside*, 381 Fourth Avenue, New York City.

GEORGE MARTIN.

Farm and Fireside.

THE CROWELL PUBLISHING CO.,
381 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

THE FORUM

THE FORUM is not publishing fiction. My own personal view, however, is that a serious magazine should print some fiction, and in the course of time *The Forum* will.

If I should be the one selecting the fiction by that time, I would look for intelligence and imagination.

GEORGE HENRY PAYNE.

The Forum.

118 East 28th Street,
New York City.

HARPER'S MAGAZINE

HARPER'S MAGAZINE is constantly seeking the work of new writers, and it probably publishes more stories by hitherto unknown writers than any other fiction periodical of reputable standing.

Harper's Magazine has no editorial prejudices, and does not ask its contributors to make their work conform to any fixed or arbitrary specifications. There is no such thing as a "Harper type" of story. Any story is acceptable which in dignity of conception and quality of workmanship has real value, provided it is also interesting.

Stories of a youthful turn, with a glimmer of humor, are particularly desired. Three thousand to seven thousand words is the preferred length.

LEE FOSTER HARTMAN.

Harper's Magazine.
Franklin Square,
New York City.

JUDGE

JUDGE'S need is for honest-to-goodness humor, the short story (under a thousand words) that forces a healthy chuckle, the poem that tickles the fancy and stirs the risibles (whatever they are) and the good old-fashioned joke with a modern setting and a sophisticated idea. Clean fun, smart fun, spontaneous fun expressed in any literary form will be acceptable and paid for generously.

Judge's circulation is booming; that is happening only because this magazine is human, modern, entertaining, American and very often genuinely humorous.

PERRITON MAXWELL.

Judge.
225 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

LESLIE'S

AT present a great number of Americans, both men and women, are seriously interested in business conditions and its problems. For this reason when we decided to limit our publishing to one type of story—we publish but one story a week, and that of limited length—we decided for the time being to publish only business stories. We prefer those of constructive turn or of such dramatic intensity that interest is compelled. We do not want love stories in a business setting. We do occasionally accept the humorous story, as often a writer in this guise can present a more fundamental truth or give a better picture of actual conditions than could be projected in any other way.

In asking for business stories we do not feel that we are limiting the writer. American business is so broad in scope, so diversified in character, so tied up with the every day life of all of us, it has so many facets of interest, so many angles of approach that any one who writes can surely produce a business story if he or she will. A good business story is bound to be an interesting story, and interest to my mind is after all the aim and end of all fiction writing.

PERRITON MAXWELL.

Leslie's.
225 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

LIFE

LIFE'S principal need is humor. After humor comes sentiment, and after sentiment, satire. *Life* will consider original jokes, short (very short) dialogues, epigrams, epigrammatical comments, light verse and manuscripts up to 500 words on subjects of topical or news interest containing these three elements singly or in combination. Before submitting, it is best to make a comprehensive study of what is printed in the magazine and to model the contribution on similar lines. By reason of the seeming simplicity of its contents, *Life* is constantly receiving contributions which make no pretense at literary preparation and are therefore unavailable.

HENRY WILLIAM HANEMANN.

Life.
17 West 31st Street,
New York City.

LIVE STORIES

LIVE STORIES is not afraid of ideas. Outside of humor, it insists upon something more than just a good story. Humor, of course, is more than humor only when handled by a master. There are not many masters of humor in America; in fact, neither American writers nor readers have a real sense of humor. They have, mostly, a keen sense of the ridiculous and a really brilliant appreciation of wit. Doubtless the difficulty every editor experiences in getting good humorous stories is thus explained. It also accounts for *Live Stories'* belief that it is useless to look for an idea in humorous contributions. "There ain't no such animal" in America, and if there were it is doubtful if the public would appreciate it.

In the list of short stories memorable, one finds that each is based on an *idea*; that is, each is more than a story. "The Fall of The House of Usher," "They," "The Man Without a Country," "Lear of the Steppes," "A Bit of String," are striking examples that come readily to mind. The list could be extended to embrace all of the great short stories. O. Henry, you will notice, is not represented here. Indeed, the bulk of O. Henry's stories are without ideas. Have you never noticed that it is difficult to remember an O. Henry story? The explanation lies in the fact that they are *just* stories—delightful, captivating, what you will—but they are not intense, compelling an undivided concentration.

Live Stories has, deliberately, gone in for ideas. It was this policy that led it to publish Thomas Grant Springer's, "The Blood of the Dragon," a story that won honorable mention by the O. Henry Memorial Committee of the Society of Arts and Sciences. "The Blood of the Dragon" was rejected by a large number of New York editors who, doubtless, were entirely right in their position. Yet this study of the Chinese character will be remembered long after the *stories* those editors published are forgotten.

To entertain and more, that is the policy of *Live Stories*. It does not want trick stories; it doesn't want a fabricated and artificial drama; it does not want action simply for action; it does not want weeping authors. It does want the tenseness incident to an inevitable situation. It wants drama, happy or tragic, based upon a fundamental idea. In short, *Live Stories* wants ideas, clearly, forcibly, dramatically evolved.

GROVE WILSON.

Live Stories.

THE NEW FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY,
35-37 West Thirty-ninth Street, New York City.

McCALL'S MAGAZINE

McCALL'S finds it hard to specify its standards of the perfect McCall story, because we believe a magazine should cultivate a diversity of story types. A publication with a circulation of over one million and a half, read by people scattered all over the United States, should carefully select from a wide field.

In a short story, we demand first, perhaps that it be a story; that it tell itself convincingly, and interestingly, with its due measure of plot, characterization and charm of style. Honesty and truthfulness in theme and treatment are essential. Though we are opposed to the sentimental and saccharine tale which has been the accepted convention for the woman's magazine, we believe in romance and adventure and glamour. Life is colored with those three things, and a story is either dull or fantastic unless it bear relation to life.

Although *McCall's* is a woman's magazine, we believe there is no sex in reading, that a woman is not necessarily interested in the old conventionally accepted story in which gilded heroes and heroines pranced through a hectic and golden existence, in which the heroine's name was always Gwen or Violet, in which the desired male prize was always married off to the poor but noble girl at the consummating altar. Nor need all women's magazine stories have to do with the abuse of the sacrificial mother or the efforts of an orphan stenographer alone in a great city. Love and money and fame may be fundamental pillars of plots, as of life; but to-day's woman, even as to-day's flapper, demands more than the sentimental narration of their inter-twinings.

As for the young author, we welcome him—or her. The famous and the arrived have their place, but the world is ever to the oncoming. If there is a germ of a story in any neophyte's contribution, *McCall's* is only too glad to throw all its energies into framing for it a more effective setting.

BESSIE BRATTY.

McCall's Magazine.
236-250 West Thirty-seventh Street,
New York City.

McCLURE'S MAGAZINE

IT is difficult to frame rigidly the deciding factors in selecting fiction for a magazine that is planned for the general reading public. Any reply that I may make must be human rather than formal.

You see, the work of buying for and making a magazine is a firing line job. Tactics and strategy go into preparation for the battle, but in the strife one does many things because they have to be done.

Reduced to practicality, I buy what I want when I get it.

You will say, to tell you what I want, since I know it. But if I did, you would be misled, for all wants are not constant.

Fundamentals, of course, are, but they are rather the fundamentals of art—an idea to convey, a picture to paint, in short, creation. A creative thought first, then an object modeled with the tools of craftsmanship. Finally, a composition (in the painting rather than the writing sense) that, when looked at from points in a sense afar, tells what the creator wants to tell.

I am trying here, perhaps indistinctly, to state that said creator has to build for perspective. He has to make things, actions and persons *seem* real. For example, the actor is made up for the appearance he will make to you sitting on the other side of the footlights. He does not strive, in the laying on of paint, for the effect on you standing at his side, but on you more remote. Contrariwise, if he did not make up, he would seem to you in that audience as unreal, and unnatural.

There is a good lesson in this for the young writer, if I can get it over.

It is the distinction between crude photographic reality and the art of reality; it is the proof of the uselessness of writing from life alone, without the craft of employing materials so that the reader (the audience of the theatre) sees the picture not only of the actuality of life, but of the life the author meant that he should see.

Not that the author departs from the rôle of observer and picture maker. The artist is indeed the mirror of nature. That is his function—high and chosen.

He has that which is not given to us of colder blood and thought. His temperature is higher, he sees often what we do not see. Creation is fever, let us say, but after creation comes craft, and that is as cold and critical and laborious as creation is hot.

The actor must be master of himself, tiniest muscle of the finger and act of the mind, to portray the frenzy of emotion. The writer must have the craft to weave texture in sentence and word, to get clarity and simplicity, to lay tone on tone of character lineament, all the while keeping plot a-moving and reader interest unfaltering. No work can be harder than this—even where talent has been granted, and craftsmanship acquired.

Personally, I do not believe that the untalented (persons without creative imagination) should be encouraged to study the mechanics of fiction technique. The waste is in energy which might win success in some other field.

Markets may prove to be lower than the ideals of writers, but that should be the fault of the markets and not of the writers. Nor will this course of faithfulness to ideals fail in recompense in one form or another, for this is the law:

The best art has the best chance of popularity and the only chance of long life.

Recognition often is delayed, but won in time, generally in due time.

Because, for one thing, it drives through discouragement. If the talent is not hardy enough to do so, the chances are that it is not sufficiently virile to deserve the crown.

In general, money gainful success comes to the talented American writer too soon if not too easily. If one works harder than ever after success has come, no harm is done. And if one stops working, success passes. So the situation, after all, contains its own remedy.

You ask me finally, if I have any suggestion as to what writers should send to a particular magazine. I have noticed for years, that writers study a magazine with the aim of sending it material of the order of which it appears to publish most. For convenience, we will call this a magazine major. I am quite sure the selling method is wrong, and that magazines should be studied for their minors instead. It stands to reason that editors will have more difficulty in supplying the minor balances. Mind, I do not say the lesser, for I am referring to quantity, not quality.

You see, a general magazine circulation may be likened to a circle, divided into segments. No one unit of contents will have appeal for the whole circle. That would be universality, practically impossible to achieve. But it can be aimed at. Certain basic factors are known. One kind of material can be depended upon for a larger segment than another. The smaller segments, however, are no less essential, and more effort will have to be used to fill them than will be used to supply the

largest segment. Circulation comes from adding interest to interest—up to the point of harmony. Beyond, of course, lies confusion, but the problem of how far to go and when to stop is an editor's, not a writer's. It is sufficient for a writer to be able to know how to take market advantage of an editor's need of maximum circulation pull from the smaller as well as the larger segments of the circle.

EDGAR SISSON.

McClure's Magazine.
25 West Forty-fourth Street,
New York City.

METROPOLITAN

IN choosing fiction for a popular magazine one must be sure first of all that the story will appeal to a large audience of readers. It must have the essential quality of holding the attention. A story which the Editor has to make an effort to read is not very likely to receive much attention from any one else. On the other hand, if a story, through qualities of form, construction, style and the needed element of suspense, literally carries one along from page to page, it has at least the first essential quality of a popular magazine story.

Every Editor, of course, will tell you this. We shall not differ a great deal, either, I imagine, in what we say afterward. Every Editor likes dramatic suspense, every Editor likes naturalness and humor in the characters when he can get it.

But when you apply yourself to the practical task of selecting manuscripts for your own publication you do consciously or unconsciously evolve a set of rules by which the final verdict of yes or no is governed. We buy eight or ten short stories a month for the *Metropolitan* in addition to an occasional serial. Naturally these stories are not to be all of one kind. I should say, however, that there is a sort of category into which we prefer our stories to fall. It is perhaps somewhat the same with magazine editors as with other persons such as painters and musicians who manifest their tastes more directly—we go in for very different degrees of intensity in the portrayal of a life, and so on. I can think of Editors who pin their faith, because they like it, to clever, thin, mauvish specimens of the art of fiction; of others who love the middle register of common life; and still others who go in for the heights and depths of emotion, the

passionate crises which after all do enter into the lives of practically all people. There are many ways of interesting the public; our way in the *Metropolitan* lies a good deal in the field last mentioned. We believe in dynamic fiction, we like it so much that we would rather have a crudely done but expressive story from a new hand than a manufactured, tepid yarn from the best of practiced writers. Manufactured stuff in general we abhor, although we do not fail to see that many of our contemporaries do quite well with it. But stop, there is a kind of manufactured story which we welcome; detective stories, night life adventures, the thriller which produces a murder of the unpopular character and skilful escape of the hero,—we like these in spite of the fact that the whole thing is a frame. Of this class of stories it is to be said that they resemble a play in which you take for granted a good deal of unreality without which the thing could not take place at all, and lend yourself to the breathless character of the performance.

We care nothing about happy or unhappy endings. Of course when the only thing a writer really has to offer you as a reward for reading a lot of pages is a peculiarly lugubrious finish we decline to be enthusiastic. But there are many stories which are far better for having sad endings. And if we think so we are confident that the public, which is also human, thinks so too. But there is one thing we have strong convictions about; namely, length. Ten years ago five thousand words was a good length for a short story. Since that time, unhappily, writers have become so proficient on the typewriter, that they pour out eight, ten and twelve thousand words without being able to stop. In most cases this is utterly unnecessary and spoils the performance for any purpose except filling space, or encouraging a siesta on the part of the reader. Conditions of magazine publication have encouraged authors to write at length instead of compressing and intensifying their work. We do not hold with this school. For the *Metropolitan* we want short stories—the shorter the better, provided everything is put in that should be. No master of the short story has made a practice of writing the long, ungainly things which are commonly produced nowadays. Poe didn't. Maupassant didn't. O. Henry and Kipling didn't. It is not to the point to argue that all of these men wrote at times lengthy tales; when they did there was some excuse for it; but their finest work was always short. When we begin to receive in our office a flood of manuscripts ranging from two to five thousand words, then we shall think a new inspiration has come to the great benefit of the whole writing profession.

In this connection note the work of Booth Tarkington. The best short stories we have ever published came from his pen and they filled no more than from fifteen to twenty pages of typewritten paper. There is a man who builds up a short story piece by piece, every word, every sentence counts. And this reminds us to say that the William Sylvanus Baxter stories may not be supposed to fall quite in the circle which we drew a little way above to mark our special *Metropolitan* field. But they do. Intense reality may quite as readily, though by no means so easily, appear in the form of humor as along lines of emotional stress. Moreover, the great humanity and genius of Booth Tarkington place him beyond the need of classification of any sort. He is a great writer in any style he chooses, and for example of another style of his writing we refer to "The Magnificent Ambersons," that pointed and tragic novel of real life which appeared as a serial in the *Metropolitan*.

If we looked for eight or ten Booth Tarkington's a month we would very quickly enter a padded cell, although we may confide that the Circulation Manager will have no objections if we describe each one of our writers in terms just as superlative. Let us hasten to say, then, without raking up a list of famous names, as we might do, that we are extremely enthusiastic about many, many authors who do not perhaps sell us more than one story apiece a year. There are exceptions like Elinor Mordaunt, whose remarkable tale-telling talent, whose romantic flair for the picturesque and dramatic, whose love of the salt sea and strange adventures and adventurers, have been deeply appreciated in the *Metropolitan* many times in the last few years. But as a rule we do not harry and pursue one author. We want the fresh and new, the deeply felt, the sincere, the genuine effort, wherever we can find it. We look for it continually.

SONYA LEVIEN.

Metropolitan.
432 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

THE MODERN PRISCILLA

THE MODERN PRISCILLA finds its readers among the highly intelligent home-abiding women of the country, and in the choice of suitable fiction for them, stories of dramatic interest having to do with the affairs of real people are what is most desired.

We do not want sapless stories, but those that are vital, colorful, interesting, and concerned with the actual problems of to-day.

We plan always to publish two stories a month, not over four thousand words in length.

THE EDITORS.

Modern Priscilla,
85 Broad Street,
Boston, Mass.

MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE

AT the time of the compilation of this book there had been a recent change in editorial management. The editors in charge said that they were constantly on the look out for good short stories, the kind that were being published in The Red Book, The Saturday Evening Post and The Cosmopolitan. As a matter of fact the stories that are usually published in Munsey's Magazine are generally shorter; another point of differentiation that might be brought out is that they are lighter in manner of treatment if not in actual theme. This though is only a generalization and many exceptions can immediately be pointed out for they have in the past published stories by men like Cobb and Abdullah that the other editors had feared as too extreme.

Munsey's Magazine.
THE FRANK A. MUNSEY CO.,
280 Broadway,
New York City.

MYSTERY MAGAZINE

THE first requirement for stories in *Mystery Magazine*, is interest. Literary style is of no consequence if the stories arouse and hold our readers' interest from beginning to end. The types required, are detective stories and mystery stories. In the former we must have plots containing absorbing mysteries, with few principal characters, a pretty love theme, plenty relevant dialogue, lively action, and local color pertaining to the police department. A slight touch of comedy is permissible, but dramatic climaxes are the rule. Long drawn descriptions tire. Large numbers of characters confuse, and too much dialogue is irksome. These romances must be distinctly, as their name implies, detective stories, and they must cater to girls as well as to men.

The mystery stories must be based upon popular occult theories, with lucid and logical explanations of the phenomena, or they can be mere mysteries of a material nature. In short we only purchase good wholesome stories, with gripping interest, tense situations and powerful, mystifying plots, having a simple explanation. Sex problems and stories of loose morals are not wanted.

LU SENARENS.

Mystery Magazine.
FRANK TOUSEY, Publisher,
168 West 23rd Street,
New York City.

THE OUTLOOK

THE OUTLOOK has only a limited space available for the publication of fiction, and therefore there are certain arbitrary bounds which we must set, bounds which have little or no relation to literary merit. We do not use continued stories and we practically never accept single stories of more than five thousand words in length, and seldom stories of more than three or four thousand words.

Within this rather narrow limit we are anxious to secure stories which show that the author has a background or experience and a knowledge of human nature. Fiction which

indicates the fact that its author has a sense of form, as well as an idea to express, is doubly welcome. Stories which are sentimental do not appeal to us, but we are also convinced that stories with real strength can be written which are not raw, crude, or offensive to good taste. We do not think that the adjective "strong" and the adjective "unpleasant" are necessarily synonymous.

After all, the editorial selection of fiction depends so much upon the personal equation and upon the immediate needs of a journal that it is difficult to give any more definite guide than that we have presented here to those who desire to submit fiction to *The Outlook*.

THE EDITORS OF *The Outlook*.

The Outlook Company.
381 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

THE PARISIENNE

THE following is in response to your question about what kind of fiction we want for *The Parisienne* and *Saucy Stories*:

The Parisienne and *Saucy Stories* differ only very slightly in type of fiction. Both want stories with very rapid action and strong, novel plots. *The Parisienne* wants romance, gaiety, adventure, mystery, in the foreign and society setting. *Saucy Stories* wants melodrama, adventure, mystery, romance, preferably in an American setting. Both prefer the sex element, though this is not absolutely essential. We want, however, to emphasize especially that neither magazine wants stories that are unpleasantly risqué. Occult stories are acceptable but nothing horrible.

But, as a matter of fact, it is easier to say what we do not want than what we do want—here are some of the constant rejections:

First and last, nothing that is risqué.

Fillers in which the mysterious he, she or it turns out to be a cat, dog or baby.

Stories in which the husband, wife or fiancé fails to recognize wife, husband or fiancée masquerading in any guise.

Stories in which the mysterious man whom husband suspects

turns out to be the brother, or the unknown lady whom wife suspects turns out to be the sister.

Stories in which the denouement explains that the entire plot is merely a rehearsal for the movies or a play.

Stories in which the supposed farmer's daughter turns out to be a famous movie star.

Stories in which the starving heroine is persuaded to play the part of an imaginary wife in order that the rich relative will leave his money to the nephew whom he wanted to see marry before passing on.

Stories in which a will demands that two people who hate each other marry and they do fall in love with one another.

Stories in which all complications are explained by the unknown existence of a twin.

War stories.

Suicide stories.

We realize that this list is quite incomplete, but we hope that it will act as a suggestion to would-be *Parisienne* and *Saucy Stories* contributors that they consider very carefully before submitting a story, whether the plot answer our first requisite—novelty.

And we want to make an earnest plea that authors will not only read this short article carefully, but will look over both magazines and get some idea of the type of fiction required before sending in stories that are totally unsuited to either publication.

THE EDITORS.

The Parisienne.

Saucy Stories.

25 West Forty-fifth Street,
New York City.

THE PEOPLE'S HOME JOURNAL

THE conscientious writer of fiction, the man who takes his work seriously, is sure to get his innings. And at no time in the history of magazines has this been so true as now. War conditions were responsible for a four-years' opportunity seized by too many mediocre writers to get their wares before the reading public. The result has been a healthy, vigorous reaction against the sort of stuff Editors were perhaps obliged to accept when so many able-bodied, sober-minded drivers of the

quill were across the sea fighting for battle honors instead of bay wreaths.

Because for thirty-six years *The People's Home Journal* has been called "the magazine for every member of the family," it has offered a more inclusive market for fiction than magazines making their principal appeal to women. Big stories of the out of doors have helped to swell the *Journal's* circulation. On the other hand, the kind of story that surprises the laugh before the tear is over is popular with our readers.

Certainly these readers will not stand either for the dry-as-dust, categorical type of story, nor for the rapid-fire type, the kind manufactured, not created. The *Journal's* rising newsstand sales respond barometer-wise to a *Journal* serial built around love, mystery or high adventure, but crowded with real things happening and truthful in its transcript of healthy emotions. Studies in morbid pathology come to every Editor's desk, usually from the amateur, but the sane reactions which follow situations dealing with real people are what most readers understand and like. The villain who might be your next-door neighbor, the hero who could have jostled elbows with you in the subway, the heroine who is the not impossible she of every man's dreams are sure to score.

There will always be a demand for the psychological story. And the story dealing with mental processes can be made as tense and gripping as the so-called action story if it has actual story interest. But too many psychological stories start out to prove something of no importance.

In the last analysis, "the story's the thing," whether it deals with battle, murder or sudden death, or with the complexities of mind induced by a given situation.

If I were asked to explain briefly what I considered the chief characteristic of *The People's Home Journal* story, I would say that it is dramatic because it interprets life in a way to stir the emotions, and I would add that it usually contains a message, always clear to the reader, a message which lingers in his memory when perhaps the plot, the characters and the story's charm have faded.

MARY BOTSFORD CHARLTON.

The People's Home Journal,
76-88 Lafayette Street,
New York City.

PEOPLE'S MAGAZINE

IT is one of the easiest things in the world to make a statement of the negative side of a proposition and it is correspondingly difficult to give an adequate and intelligent idea of all that is involved in the positive.

So, it is invariably my impulse to tell what I don't want when I am asked to explain the needs of the magazine of which I happen to be the editor. At the present time I am in editorial charge of the *People's Magazine*, and its special aversions can be briefly and, I hope, comprehensively stated.

We will return, as promptly as courtesy permits, all manuscripts purporting to be stories—the magazine uses only fiction—but which are, in fact, nothing more than catalogues or monologues. "Catalogues" include fiction in which descriptive writing prevails, with a minimum amount of action and characterization. This applies also to so-called "machine-made" stories, narratives merely of events, bare recitals of what happened to so-and-so under such-and-such conditions. The objection to such stories is that, as a rule they are anemic in substance, superficial in conception and perfunctory in execution. They are lacking in real vital, dramatic interest. Monologues, in the derivative sense in which I have used the term, obviously means a "story within a story," or one told by one of the characters.

Specifically, the *People's Magazine* will not publish a sex story, or even what is, generically and innocuously, a love story, though as to the latter, one which is otherwise acceptable will not be rejected because it embodies a love interest which is a necessary episode in the plot; it does not care for pseudo-scientific stories, or business stories constructed according to the formulas in common use; it objects to prize-fight or other sport stories, but only those of the conventional type which, after glancing at the opening, the average reader can finish for himself with little deviation from the text; it objects to society stories, high, middle-class or low, and it turns its back on horrors, sordidness and abnormality. And finally it cannot use mere character or psychological studies, which are not stories at all.

This is a very brief statement, limited by space requirements, of what the *People's Magazine* does not want.

What it *does* want will take a little longer to tell. The prevailing note of the magazine is open air adventure, with a distinctly American flavor; with this qualification we impose no limitations as to place. Adventure stories with a setting in the United States or Canada may be put in a period within the limits of the nineteenth or twentieth centuries. There is a

mine of authentic material of highly dramatic character, much of which, to be sure, has been used in fiction, but by no means all. We do not object to the use in fictional forms of historical events and characters by name; in fact we rather welcome it.

Every one, of course, is familiar with the "western story." Thanks to "The Virginian" it has been popularized by the magazines and vulgarized by the movies; we object, not to the "western story," but to its formula. If anybody has anything fresh and original to contribute to it we will thank God and reward him according to his deserts and our ability. Open air adventure, American, but in any part of the world is, as I have said, the prevailing note, and we want to strike that note with a complete novel of from 30,000 to 50,000 words in every number.

In general, and excluding the type of stories I have already referred to as those that we don't want, we will accept any short or continued story that is a really good one; this covers the mystery story.

Now a story, in order to deserve the name, must involve a conflict or duel, either of human beings, or—proceeding of course from human beings—ideas or emotions. Without the conflict there is no drama, and without the drama there is no story. And out of the conflict and complication should come a denouement which satisfies the reader's sense of justice or his sense of the appropriateness of things in general. Such a denouement may incur the reproach of being a "happy ending," but the author should rid himself of that bugaboo and not be afraid of utilizing it, if *necessary*. It's only a cant phrase and does not mean a thing to the masses who read him and make his reputation for him. Personally, I believe that most unhappy endings are deliberately planned and thrown in as a sop to the Cerberus of "realism."

A real story ought to have an initial impulse that carries it along, without faltering, from beginning to end, that is to say, *movement*. A great many stories sag at some point, or collapse in the middle or go to pieces at the end. Such catastrophes can be averted.

It sometimes seems to me that very, very few authors realize how much honest, sincere characterization helps a story—how much, indeed, it may help to make a genuine story out of a very slender plot. The human element is what gives a story such vitality as it has and time and effort devoted to it is well spent, and usually profitably spent.

This leads me to say that the human touch is the thing we look for in every manuscript that comes in to *People's* editorial office; somewhere in each story we hope to find an un-

expected display, by one or more of the characters, of courage, or generosity, or renunciation, or self-sacrifice, or some other human trait that brings to the reader a conviction that, after all, human nature is better than experience has taught him to believe. This is the sort of thing that people never weary of. Common-place characters, common-place experiences, common-place emotions take on dramatic color by these unlooked-for demonstrations.

Finally, we want our stories told in plain, direct, straightforward style. We object to any peculiarity of phraseology which tends to divert the attention of the reader from the substance of the story to the manner of the writer. But individuality of style, which is quite another thing, and honest slang, judiciously used, are welcome.

I want to conclude with a word on some of the delusions, as they seem to me, about what is called "the art of the short story," or of "short story writing." I am almost tempted to say that there is no such art, but I have no desire to dogmatize because, in dealing in generalities, it is always necessary to add qualifications. I should say that story-telling is instinctive; that every human being has the story-telling sense. There's nothing particularly original in that idea, but it seems to me that its significance has been curiously neglected with the result that so-called instruction in the forms of an alleged art has taken the place of the cultivation of an inherent impulse. The faculty of observation is the one which, first of all, makes any story possible. In O. Henry it was so highly developed that, at a glance, he saw a significance in things that simply did not exist for most people, even for trained writers. To this he added facility of expression and a sense of humor, which is fundamentally, a sense of proportion; and he paid little attention to forms. I speak of him because he illustrates so distinctly the points I have in mind and also because I was intimately acquainted with him and with his methods.

Of course "we can't all be O. Henrys"—he was born with the story-telling sense fully developed—but we can attain a certain degree of approximation to his achievements by diligent cultivation of the three essentials that he had without cultivation, namely: observation, expression, proportion. And this is a lesson that must be self-taught—nobody can teach it, for the simple reason that one person cannot do another's hard work.

A. L. SESSIONS.

People's Popular Monthly.
79 Seventh Avenue,
New York City.

THE PEOPLE'S POPULAR MONTHLY

WHEN we buy a short story there are three very different things which we desire that story to do:

First: It must tell a story compellingly—so compellingly that when one is through reading, there is a very definite emotional response which stays with the reader. If one is conscious of the means technically employed to place the story before the reader, that story has failed as such.

If, however, the narrative takes you out of yourself and gives you a definite feeling of sympathy with that of the people in the story—it is in this point successful.

Second: Having gripped the attention and taken a hold upon the feeling of the reader, it must, in order to qualify for a place in our pages, fill a very real need in the lives of our particular type of readers.

There are many splendid stories which we are forced to return, due to the fact that they do not fill this particular need.

We have among our readers a preponderance of people who have been limited in their mental experiences and are consequently limited in their intellectual grasp. They are, however, from the rural and small town districts in that opulent region extending from the Alleghenies to the Rockies, and are, by virtue of this fact, a peculiarly keen and progressive people. Their judgment is sincere and their viewpoint is human. Their lives are in many cases a bit monotonous and often isolated; in consequence of which a story should have a real narrative interest, and, in all cases, strong entertainment value, with a wholesome dose of brightness and good cheer. We return all morbidly tragic stories.

Third: When we have found a story which stirs the feeling and fills the need of our particular readers, it is then time, and not until then, to look to the technic of the story. That is something which can be regulated to a large extent by editing in those cases where errors are not too flagrant.

There is, of course, a certain readability of expression, absolutely imperative, but that is something incorporate with the first point. They are practically inseparable.

Therefore, granted that the style was such as to make the emotional feeling paramount to the word consciousness of the reader—then any errors which may have crept in are not too flagrant to be corrected.

Of course, we do not find, in as many cases as we wish, stories which meet all three requirements, and oftentimes our pages have in them things which fall short of these three points.

The People's Popular Monthly.
Des Moines, Iowa.

ELIZABETH B. CANADAY.

PHOTOPLAY

I DO NOT believe that any editor, whether of a fiction magazine or any periodical, can judge material successfully on any other than a very personal basis of likes and dislikes. In other words, I buy a story if I like it, and believe this to be the only method. Someone has to pass on it finally, and a publication must stand or fall on his judgment.

JAMES R. QUIRK.

Photoplay.
25 West Forty-fifth Street,
New York City.

PICTORIAL REVIEW

YOU ask me a pretty difficult question—I have no absolute rule for saying yes or no to a short story and, as far as that goes, I don't think any other editor has. There are such things in magazine offices as editorial policies, but if they are good editorial policies they must be more or less elastic, subject to change without notice and not very well defined anyway. Folks come in and ask me what kind of stories *Pictorial Review* likes. The only answer I can give is "good stories." If they ask why I buy this story and not that, I would say because I think it more interesting than the other, but to go further and to ask me to explain precisely why it is the more interesting is too much for me. There may be editors who can sit down and in a magic manner tell just exactly why they bought this story and refused that, but they must be smarter editors than I am. I really cannot do it with sincerity or conviction and do not try.

Do I buy stories because I like them myself or because I think our readers will like them? That's another sticker. I generally buy stories because I like them myself, because if I disregarded my own taste and tried to pick out a story that our readers would like and which I didn't like, I would be hopelessly at sea all the time.

I would really feel ashamed of myself were I to publish a story which I personally thought to be piffle just because I thought it would "sell the magazine."

Moreover, I don't think any editor knows just what his readers like or *might* like except in a general way. We have no

exact way of telling and my experience has been to follow my own judgment and, when the Circulation Manager comes along and tells me the circulation of the magazine is increasing by leaps and bounds, I am then licensed to feel that my judgment must have been good. Because I am just a plain, ordinary type of person and there must be hundreds of thousands and millions of people in the country like me; and what interests me will quite generally interest them, at least I have found it so. Don't take from this that the Circulation Manager comes along every month and tells me the circulation of the magazine is increasing by leaps and bounds, but sometimes he does, and then I know a certain story or serial in the magazine got across in a big way; but what does that mean? It doesn't mean that I can go out off-hand and get another story just like it and ring the bell again. We don't buy stories that way—writers do not write them that way—I wish they did because the editor's job would be easy.

Now here's another peculiar thing, *Pictorial Review* is a woman's magazine, and yet I am a man and there is nothing particularly feminine about me in my tastes or activities. We do not pick out stories because we think they are good woman's magazine stories; in fact, we have no earthly use for the typical woman's magazine story, that sweet and pretty, mush and milk affair that used to grace the pages of our contemporaries. We found out years ago that women were interested in good, short stories that picture the vital, human things in life and that there was no real reason for their being obliged to go to the men's magazines to read them. So we began to publish real stories in *Pictorial Review*.

I realize that all this is more or less indefinite and possibly of little help to the aspiring author, but if said aspiring author will bear in mind that the only way to sell short stories is to make them interesting and, if they are made sufficiently interesting, they will sell themselves—that's all there is to it.

ARTHUR T. VANCE.

Pictorial Review.

THE PICTORIAL REVIEW COMPANY,
214-226 West 39th Street,
New York City.

POPULAR MAGAZINE

IN selecting stories I bear in mind the fact that the buying of fiction is a business and not a literary occupation. This means that I have always in mind the ultimate consumer—the fellow who knows nothing of literature as such but who likes good stories.

What are these?

First and foremost, a story about a new phase of life and industry. The American reader is by no means a prude or intolerant, but he likes sane, almost practical stuff. He likes romance, but it must be normal and wholesome. He does not like the erotic or morbid. Without being in the least “literary,” his taste is surprisingly good. As a rule, he does not want tragedies, but will accept them if exceedingly well done. A good mystery story is sure-fire.

Current American fiction is one of the liveliest things in the world to-day. Keen intelligence goes into the making of it. It plays a bigger part in the formation of public opinion than most people know. It is a genuinely civilizing influence. As a rule, a man's taste in fiction improves and his standards in stories become higher the more he reads. The very cheapest of the magazines are turning the foreign populations of the second generation in our cities into Americans at a surprising rate. The author of the day is writing for a big public, not a small, select one.

Here are a few things for the author to bear in mind. If a writer can describe human beings so well that they seem real; if he sometimes laughs at, sometimes is irritated with, sometimes loves these people who come to life in the pages of the story, he has his first great point. If he can write conversation such as you actually hear he has his second. If he can write good, straightforward English, at once clear, forcible, and vivid, he has the third. But all of these are of no use unless the author has the sense of construction that makes him write real stories,—that is, plots that unfold and develop to a logical conclusion, instead of mere sketches or anecdotes. The one satisfies; the other does not.

Successful authors all work hard, and the bigger an author is the more you can criticise his work to his face. He appreciates that it is a technical calling and he wants and appreciates intelligent criticism.

Are there many good writers who can't get a hearing? Practically none. Names count in a fashion. The author who has

a public gets stronger with his readers the more he writes. If a man has a literary gift and the energy and persistency back of it he will find fiction a good business.

But just because story-writing has taken on some of the aspects of commercialism it has by no means lost the romance, the humor, the humanity, that it had in the old Grub Street days. After all, we are dealing with the stuff that dreams are made of, the inspiration of ambition, the literature of hope and effort and human aspiration, the running chronicle of our ways, our manners, our civilization. Most of it will fade and pass with the fading years; some of it will live.

CHARLES AGNEW MACLEAN.

Popular Magazine.

STREET AND SMITH CORPORATION,
Seventh Avenue and Fifteenth Street,
New York City.

THE RED BOOK MAGAZINE

KARL HARRIMAN, the editor, had promised a statement as he said that he welcomed this opportunity to point out to would-be contributors the differentiation in editorial policy between The Red Book Magazine, The Blue Book Magazine and The Green Book Magazine. However, a press of unexpected work made it impossible for him to do this before this book had to be sent to press. At that time he spoke in a general way of the fact that for The Red Book Magazine he was constantly looking for stories of the different sections of the United States; then again for stories of the different interests that were absorbing the attention of the people at the moment, such as stories of oil, psychic stories, etc. For The Blue Book Magazine he wanted more out-and-out adventure and tales that would primarily appeal to men; for The Green Book Magazine stories that would find their immediate audience among women.

The Red Book Magazine.

The Blue Book Magazine.

The Green Book Magazine.

36 South State Street,
Chicago, Ill.

THE SATURDAY EVENING POST

GEORGE HORACE LORIMER, the editor-in-chief of *The Saturday Evening Post*, said quite frankly when asked to write briefly his attitude and point of view in the selecting of fiction for his magazine that neither he nor his staff were willing to regard the *Post* as a training school for young writers.

He went on to say that he and his associates felt that the circulation of the magazine, the fact that it bought more fiction than any other American periodical, paid well and quickly, and published without great delay, made it inevitable that most writers who entered the profession would in the course of events submit material to the *Post*. Should a story by an unknown writer please one of the staff readers it would then be submitted to him and to his immediate associates for acceptance or rejection. Should this same writer succeed equally with subsequent stories, the *Post's* editors would then personally consult with this author as to the magazine's immediate needs and help by suggestion and advice to make his or her material more available from the *Post* viewpoint.

In this connection it is interesting to note that while their list of writers includes many of the best-known names among American short story writers, the magazine has also accepted and published the stories of many writers who had had no previous audience and whose names were until the time of their appearance in the *Post* wholly unknown.

While it is perhaps impossible to state tersely what the *Post* wants, and while Mr. Lorimer may hesitate to speak didactically as to what is and what is not a good short story, the earnest student can easily discern certain of the *Post* requirements by a study of the magazine. That the stories are inclined to run to a certain more or less definite length; that the majority are American in both setting and characters; that they conform to a certain standard of writing and method of treatment is at once apparent, and certain errors of judgment in submission may easily be avoided.

The Saturday Evening Post,
CURTIS PUBLISHING Co.,
Independence Square,
Philadelphia, Pa.

SCRIBNER'S MAGAZINE

ROBERT BRIDGES, the editor of Scribner's Magazine, felt that he would do injustice to his periodical were he to attempt to say in a few short paragraphs the type of stories they preferred. He went on to say that the magazine had been in existence for so long that its reputation for good art and good craftsmanship in everything that appeared in its pages was so well established that nothing he could say would either add to or make more definitely practical from the neophyte's approach the type of fiction wanted.

Scribner's Magazine,
599 Fifth Avenue,
New York City.

SHORT STORIES

THE best, indeed the only reply to the question as to the needs of a magazine that I can think of is—read it. That is the answer for *Short Stories*.

When a writer asks me what we want for *Short Stories*, I am apt to feel a bit hopeless for, as I see it, my first duty is to seek and develop talent, and my second is to select material. I cannot feel that it is good for a fiction magazine, nor good for a fiction writer, to have the editor suggest ideas, or plots. (General magazines using non-fiction articles are different. In the nature of things they must suggest articles and ideas to their writers.) An intelligent reading of a fiction magazine will give a better idea of its aims and field than any amount of talking by the editor. We can at best, in the time at our disposal, give an idea of our field. The more important thing is the spirit of the magazine, and that can only be taken in by reading it.

Once a writer gets the spirit of the magazines he wishes to write for and has determined their respective fields, it is up to him.

Within the scope of his publication, and in its general spirit, what an editor wants most of all is *ideas*—something new, fresh, different.

There is one more preliminary point—self-analysis. Many writers suffer from lack of understanding of their own material. The field is so large to-day that any writer can develop his own natural imaginative expression and find a market for it. If

one is more interested in outdoor adventure—write it. If a writer's mind runs to psychological problem stories—write those. There are magazines looking for adventure and others looking for psychological character analysis. But don't, Mr. Writer, try to force yourself to write something you yourself do not like. You cannot write down to a field successfully, and you must develop into a higher literary class naturally, by hard work.

As for *Short Stories*: Being primarily a magazine of adventure and the outdoors, our interest naturally lies in that field first. Our public is a wide one embracing many kinds of people. Yet, when they buy a fiction magazine like *Short Stories*, we are convinced they do so in pretty much the same frame of mind. They want to be amused. They want a good story. They want to read it in a hurry, on a railroad train, in a spare hour, or to relieve a tedious wait. We believe they do not want too much complexity, nor too highly polished a style. Literary excellence is all to the good. We want it and our readers appreciate it, but it must be within our field and done in our spirit. For example, imagine the joy of our public if we could publish as brand new to-day some of Kipling's early short stories—"The Man That Would Be King," "William the Conqueror," and the rest. They fall perfectly "within our scope," and in spite of the fact that they were done by the greatest literary craftsman of the age, they are not, like some of his later work, too subtle for our public. They are mostly on the objective plane, full of action, stories straight from the shoulder.

Of course, our public like stories of the far places, of the West, both old and new, of the North and the Tropics. Yet, even to these there are some strange exceptions such as the question of remoteness from the reader's understanding. Miles are nothing to the author or to the reader of the printed page, but unless the author succeeds in making the reader feel his locality, the sense of remoteness creeps in and the story fails. Naturally, with this small world and the fairly limited number of situations possible to a human being in adventure, variety becomes a very desirable thing with us—variety, remember, within our field.

The public that reads *Short Stories* likes mystery stories. That in itself is a broad field and includes the tales of the tracking down of the perpetrators of crime—detective stories. We have mighty few hard and fast rules, but we never use a story in which we make crime and criminals heroic. If the hero of a story is a burglar, we want the story to show his redemption, the failure of crime with its ultimate punishment, or we want

his actions within the story to be for a laudable purpose. Our attitude may best be summed up by the phrase, "the effect on the young." We want no story which will have an evil effect on any reader.

Mystery stories tend to run along conventional lines. We would like some variety there. The playwrights have accomplished something new and thrilling in pieces such as: "The Unknown Purple," "The 13th Chair," "The Alibi" with excellent results. Why cannot some equally ingenious writers work out mystery tales as far from the ordinary murder or jewel mysteries as these?

And humor! Oh, give us humor! Not too subtle, nor too rough. But give us a laugh. Human interest stories too. Business stories and the sports interest our readers. They are fairly scarce, the good ones, so we are always on the lookout for them.

Short Stories, like its contemporaries, including *The Saturday Evening Post*, was created by a reading public's demand. Therefore, with the exception of the purely love stories and speaking quite generally, any story that would hit *The Saturday Evening Post* would hit us. Many and many a writer appearing regularly in that great weekly has found himself through the medium of *Short Stories* and similar magazines.

The love theme is desirable in our field. Our public, we believe, likes it, but only as a normal motive in a plot. We do not use love stories, as such, but love naturally enters into and strengthens any story, adventure, mystery, business, humor, sports, or what not.

We are not squeamish, yet we never forget that phrase, "the influence on the young." We do not want to print any story that leaves a bad taste in the mouth. Our public do not want nor expect that in *Short Stories*. Hence, the so-called sex story is not for us.

A word as to dialect. We try to print stories that read easily and smoothly. Too hard or too consistent a dialect repels readers. Likewise, the widely popular slang "roughneck" story. We use 'em of course, but we do not want 'em *too* rough. Every reader likes the relief of straight English rather than to go through page after page of dialect or slangy misspelling.

But, read the magazine, and then *within our scope* give us something different.

HARRY E. MAULE.

Short Stories.
DOUBLEDAY PAGE & COMPANY, Publishers,
Garden City, N.Y.

THE SMART SET

AS Editors of *The Smart Set*, Mencken and I buy any story that appeals to us personally. We employ no so-called "readers." Every manuscript submitted to the magazine is read by the one or the other of us. We have no rules. But, we have prejudices. Style is a most important factor. The viewpoint of a cultured man or woman is a most important factor.

GEORGE JEAN NATHAN.

The Smart Set.
25 West Forty-fifth Street,
New York City.

SNAPPY STORIES

I AM setting forth, more or less briefly, what *Snappy Stories* desires from its contributors. From its inception, this magazine has specialized in fiction and other material with a strong sex interest, and this policy is being adhered to—not because this is the only type of story that appeals to us, but because we feel that there are a vast number of readers who enjoy tales with themes based upon the relations between the sexes. This is by no means a depraved taste, but a healthy, natural one, characterizing most normal men and women. Many of the most famous stories ever written have had this so-called sex interest, and this applies also to plays and grand operas. Vulgar or salacious material is barred, but we have no objection to stories that are a trifle audacious or that have a dash of the risqué.

Each bi-monthly issue of *Snappy Stories* contains a complete novelette of from 15,000 to 18,000 words. This is the length we prefer, although we sometimes publish longer novelettes or shorter ones. They should be strongly plotted, with plenty of action and a real climax. Happy endings preferred, but not absolutely insisted upon. Occasionally a good humorous novelette or an ingeniously plotted mystery story, without a pronounced sex interest, is used.

We publish one short serial of from 20,000 to 30,000 words, suitable for two or three parts. Longer stories are occasionally taken, and used in a greater number of installments. What

we have said about the novelette applies also to the continued story: stories with sex interest stand the best chance of acceptance. Of course we desire good "breaks" where they are to be divided.

Short stories, of which we use about eight to a number, may be of almost any length, although those of 5,000 words or less are most in demand. We don't want them either padded or unduly compressed. Sex interest here also, although we sometimes use other kinds—humorous, say, or a good occult or mystery tale. We do not object to unhappy endings. Action is a desideratum. Slow moving stories, depending principally on atmosphere and characterization, are not desired.

A short play is published in every issue. These may be funny or serious. We want especially good acting plays, clever and skilfully plotted.

We use a number of poems, mostly tense love verses or those of a humorous or whimsical sort. Occasionally blank verse is used. Poems may vary in length from the quatrain to forty lines. We seldom buy longer ones, although this is not a hard and fast rule.

There is a good market here for short bits of prose, of six hundred words or less. These may be grave or gay, cynical or satirical. Jokes and epigrams are also in demand.

Writers should make a little study of the magazine to which they desire to contribute, as in this way they will save their own time as well as the editor's. We are only too glad to get in touch with new writers, and do all we can to encourage and develop them.

THE EDITOR.

Snappy Stories.

THE NEW FICTION PUBLISHING COMPANY,
35-37 West Thirty-ninth Street,
New York City.

TELLING TALES

IN the ten years or so that I have been editing magazines that question "Why I Buy the Stories I Do" has been asked of me dozens and dozens of times, and I am as far as ever from being able to answer it.

Authors and would-be authors are constantly coming and saying: "Mr. Clayton, what kind of stories do you want for your magazine?" and the only answer I can give them is, that I want any good story, providing it is not a sex story, and when they want to pin me down to what constitutes a good story I am utterly lost, and can only say that my idea of a good story is any story that I like.

I presume that every magazine to be successful must be an expression of its editor's individual taste. In other words, it must have a personality of its own, and that personality can only come from the man who makes it.

Perhaps the point that appeals to me most strongly about a story is the *humanness* of its characters. They must really *live*, so that the reader is impressed with their reality. Only thus may he come to feel toward them a friendly spirit which will lead him to take an actual interest in their adventures or misadventures, their love affairs, their successes or failures.

The *writing* of a story is not, to me, the most important part of it. If the story is there, careful editorial work will smooth out many of the crudities of expression or careless short-comings of its author, but no editing can supply a plot where none exists, nor make human or interesting characters that are obviously mere wooden puppets to their creator.

Of course, the better written a story is, the larger is apt to be the check that is sent in return for it, because naturally, an editor, like the buyer of any commodity, cannot afford to pay as much for raw materials requiring a great deal of work to put them into usable shape, as he can for a finished and perfected article.

To sum up, I would say that before writing a story an author should first have a story to tell, and then be as careful as possible in the telling. The main quality needed after that, if one is to become a successful writer, is, I should say, inexhaustible perseverance.

WILLIAM M. CLAYTON.

Telling Tales.
114 Bible House,
New York City.

TODAY'S HOUSEWIFE

YOU ask me to give you some indication of the fiction requirements of *Today's Housewife*. I can give you this very briefly: About all that we require is that the story shall be clean and interesting. It may deal with the home and child interest, it may be a married love story, a young love story, a humorous story or one of adventure and mystery. There must be no sex problem; no repulsive crime. It may be as much of a thriller as any one can desire, but it must lead to ultimate good; it must leave the reader in a satisfied frame of mind, although this does not necessarily mean that it needs have a "happy ending." It must have a satisfactory ending and it must lead the reader along an upward path. We like our stories to be full of action, plenty of sparkling dialogue, and they must be well written. We use but few stories in *Today's Housewife*, but we demand that these be of an excellent type.

DELLA T. LUTES.

Today's Housewife.
Cooperstown, N.Y.

TOP-NOTCH MAGAZINE

IT always seems to me so futile to talk to people who do not know how to write stories about the way they should be written. I feel that when I attempt it, I speak a language they do not understand. I never have a feeling that I am being understood when I talk on the subject to amateurs. And experience tells me that I am not understood. I must ask you, therefore, to excuse me from holding forth on this very illusive topic.

Thanking you for the compliment you pay me in asking me to write something, I am

Yours very truly,

HENRY W. THOMAS,
Editor.

Top-Notch Magazine.
79-89 Seventh Avenue.
New York City.

THE TOUCHSTONE

THE kind of story I am always longing to have for my magazine must have in it characters that affect me as human beings would, characters that are true to their inheritance and environment, who react honestly and sincerely to their training and surroundings. Write about any type of man, woman or child that you choose, but make them true to type, or rather true to character. For instance, the longshoreman must not only *talk*, but *think* and *feel* like a longshoreman. It seems important to me that the soubrette should not react to life as a bishop would, and that the philosophy of a returned soldier should vary somewhat from that of an elderly spinster of New England training.

In other words the fiction writer has got to know life, either by intuition, in which case he has genius; or by experience, in which case talent will serve.

And having achieved the power to see life profoundly and sincerely you must then find a way to tell your public what you see, to tell it in such a manner that you create the illusion of life in your characters, and make the characters create the illusion of reality in their environment.

An author may write cleverly, smartly, brightly, with quite a little sense of drama, sell his stories easily, and have a name that you remember, and not possess one atom of real insight into human nature, and not one moment's grasp of power to portray humanity through words that convince and thrill.

I am not at all satisfied with the idea that if you amuse the public you are a good short story writer, or even if you manage to thrill the public that your short stories are worthwhile. Very young and very poor writers can do both these things. And I do not think it at all necessary to have happy endings to stories. This absurd catering to the more feeble public mind is not thought essential in writing an opera or a great tragedy or in painting a picture. Wagner did not think that it was necessary at the end of "*Götterdämmerung*" to have his orchestra play some tinkling little melody to send his people home happy. He wrote his music so that you go home after the great sacrifice of *Brunnhilde's* filled with mighty splendid thoughts of life, love, death and immortality. When Rodin pictured "*A Thinker*," a man facing universal problems, he did not carve at his side a merry little clown to cheer up the beholder, who is afraid of thought. And a poet does not jest at the end of a beautiful rhythm that has poured out through his heart and soul.

So why should we ask of the writer, and always of the dram-

artist, that these particular works of art should invariably leave humanity smiling, light-hearted and forgetful. I do not think it is necessary to consider the ending at all, let it develop from the psychology of the people in the story, and make the episode as it would be in life to the best of your ability.

I think, perhaps, at the start, the best way to learn how to write is, *not to write*. And, of course, I mean here, not to write thoughtlessly and without relating life to words. Above all, I am opposed to studying models in writing. I would like to say, forget all about the styles that have been set before you as models. Disregard those famous old English essayists. Turn your face away firmly, however reluctantly, from Lamb, Macaulay and Carlyle. I even advise you to bid a sad farewell to Edith Wharton and Henry James. And while Bernard Shaw will amuse and delight you, he will only inspire you to imitate him. And what could be less important to you, and more torturing to the editors than to join the ever-swelling army of Shaw's imitators? Because the important thing about Shaw is—his fantastic brain, his whimsical soul, his lack of philosophy, his ability to contort all life into witty jeers, and these attributes for good or evil you must be born with.

It sounds very drastic, but I think it very important to empty your minds of all literary ideals. And above all to abandon forever the burning desire "to express yourself." Because it is immensely more important to gather through experience and vision and fine sympathy, universal truths to express, than to imagine that within oneself is hidden a great unwritten truth. Once your mind is delightfully empty and free and at your command, begin to think, to observe, to appreciate; but do not make the mistake of branding the people you meet as interesting models for fiction writing. It is far more important to think of *your characters as real people*. After you have learned to observe life honestly and very simply, all the phases of life with which you come into contact, then write exactly what you think about them, just as you would tell typical episodes to some one interested in your observation—except of course that you must tell your story conscientiously, you must bear in mind the pattern that you are weaving. And you are not writing good fiction, until you have learned to design a pattern of writing with beauty, and put it down with power.

As I think I have said before, one of the first points I look for in a story is character that is a product of its own environment. Dialogue that has an accent is not enough to separate one nation from another; it is the kind of person that is expressed through an accent that is significant. The dialogue must be

born in the soul; otherwise the impression given is irritatingly superficial and sometimes absurd.

So you see, observation is not enough for fiction writing, however searching; nor experience, however varied; nor style, however distinguished. There must be power to discern truth, and imagination to fashion for it a garment of shining loveliness. I have grown to believe that the very words used in writing should carry a weight of emotionalism. It is not enough to feel drama or to talk about drama when you are writing. Drama must pass through the actual words and drench them with fervor.

MARY FANTON ROBERTS.

The Touchstone.
1 West 47th Street,
New York City.

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE

WESTERN STORY MAGAZINE is a weekly publication. It is therefore a large fiction market, constantly in need of short stories of 2,500 to 6,000 or 7,000 words, novelettes of 12,000 or 15,000, and novels of 25,000 words. Serials should run from 36,000 to 100,000 words in length, and break up approximately in about 12,000-word installments.

All stories for *Western Story Magazine* must deal with incidents in the West, Canada, Alaska. If possible, they must be written in such a way as to urge readers to want to lead a life in the open. While many readers realize that conditions have changed in the West, the stories should be written so that the reader who knows that these conditions have changed will understand that what the author means is that such and such was the case in the good old days, and that on the other hand the reader who does not know that conditions have changed will assume that they are to-day as the author states.

No story is acceptable for *Western Story Magazine* which contains an unpleasant sex element.

F. E. BLACKWELL.

Western Story Magazine.
79 Seventh Avenue,
New York City.

THE WOMAN'S HOME COMPANION

FICTION is a very large element in our program. We publish not less than five short stories in each issue and not less than six serials a year.

These are the requirements which make a fiction manuscript available:

It must tell a story.

It must tell it well—that is, according to accepted standards of good writing.

The story must be worth telling.

The theme must be interesting to the average normal human being.

It may be a story of love, mystery, humor, pathos, childhood, youth, old age, men, women, home life, business life; its scene may be laid anywhere on earth, in the past, present or future. It may have plot and action, or merely atmosphere. It may be by an unknown writer or by the most famous. We merely want to be convinced that a great number of our readers will enjoy reading it.

Of all the stories the *Woman's Home Companion* published in 1920, I put at the head of the list, "According to Ruskin," by Harriet Welles.

It answers the requirements I have outlined. It tells a story, a poignant and appealing story. It tells it well, with skill, directness and restraint, and with power. The theme is that of sacrifice, one that has held its appeal for hundreds of years, a theme around which many of the greatest stories of all times have been written. It has both plot and atmosphere.

It was not altogether easy to choose the best story of the year's issues, and it would not be easy to choose the second or third in rank. But there are several that I wish to mention as illustrative of what we consider good stories and the kind of fiction we like to publish.

"The Neighbor" by Katharine Holland Brown is a difficult thing well done. Written with less skill and feeling it would lack the beauty that distinguishes it. It is a type of story that is seldom successful, but in Miss Brown's skilful hands it is a masterly piece of work.

"Shooting Stars" is one of Alice Brown's New England tales, well told and absorbing in its carefully-presented setting and its analysis of character.

"The Boy in the Corner" by M. C. L. Pickthall is a story of the West, of a mining town, in its setting and atmosphere. In

plot it is a study in spiritual values simply and dramatically related.

Two stories, dealing in widely different ways with love and poverty in the relation of a mother to a young daughter, are "The Genius" by Sophie Kerr, and "A Sweater for Mabel" by Elsie Singmaster. They are both admirable examples of narrative, woven around plots of universal interest.

"The Master Passion" by Mary Heaton Vorse is a piece of work that is distinguished by its keen realization of situations and values and by the mingling of emotion and reason which the story discloses.

Of lighter tone and somewhat slighter structure is "Thursday and the King and Queen" by Theodora DuBois. This is an excellent example of a pleasing humorous story, with a real plot and real people, plenty of incident and amusing situations, the kind of story we delight in.

"The Torch" by Anna Branson Hillyard is an example of a serious and sincere story dealing with one of the problems of present day young people. It is earnest without being preachy, and it has a purpose without being propaganda.

"But I Knew You'd Understand" by Ruth Comfort Mitchell is a graphic and sympathetic picture of young married life. It has a variety of well-drawn characters and an atmosphere that bears the sure touch of reality.

These are the stories that I feel I cannot pass over without mention. These stories come up to our requirements for a good piece of fiction and in every case they offer to the story-reader value that is pressed down and running over.

I am glad to have had the opportunity to publish these stories and I am happy to recommend them as examples of good contemporary fiction.

GERTRUDE B. LANE.

Woman's Home Companion.
381 Fourth Avenue,
New York City.

YOUNG'S MAGAZINE

FOR about thirty years *Young's Magazine* has been purveying fiction for the entertainment of the public. It has many readers and some contributors of twenty years' standing. Of its fellows—all-fiction magazines that started with or shortly after it—what remnant is left!

It is good philosophy, as well as common sense, that such

survival testifies to an inhering excellence or usefulness. In the case of *Young's Magazine* the quality making for survival is that not only has it given to the public what was wanted—good stories, but it has helped to create them; it has been the arena where many, now famous, perfected the use of their medium—where some have learned first principles, too—and it has helped all by criticism and advice.

Allowing full weight to *manner*—graces of style, diction and what not—*Young's* has steadfastly worked from the standpoint that *matter* comes first. The story's the thing; what the reader wants. This insistence on "meat" in the story—something cogent, logical, properly articulated—has won for the magazine a standing and a place with writers that is emphasized by its popular success.

Looking back over the index, familiar names are everywhere; selecting haphazard: Jeffery Farnol, Mary Roberts Rinehart, "Ouida," Charles Hanson Towne, Marcel Prevost, Margaret Pedler, Mrs. Justin H. McCarthy, Tom Gallon, Richard Le Gallienne, Dale Drummond, Berton Braley, Hildegard Hawthorne, Rita Weiman, Harry Kemp, Doctor Frank Crane, Octavus Roy Cohen, Nalbo Bartley, Reginald Wright Kauffman, Homer Croy, Mabel Wagnalls, Henry Payson Dowst, Martha M. Stanley, William Le Queux, Oliver Sandys, Nina Wilcox Putnam, Elizabeth Jordan, Grace MacGowan Cooke, Julian Hawthorne, Achmed Abdullah, Hapsburg Liebe, Jules Eckert Goodman, Roi Cooper Megrue, Clarence L. Cullen, Jeanne Judson, Channing Pollock, Percival Weil, Louise Winter, Martha Morton, Temple Bailey, Gertrude Brooke Hamilton, Maude Fulton.

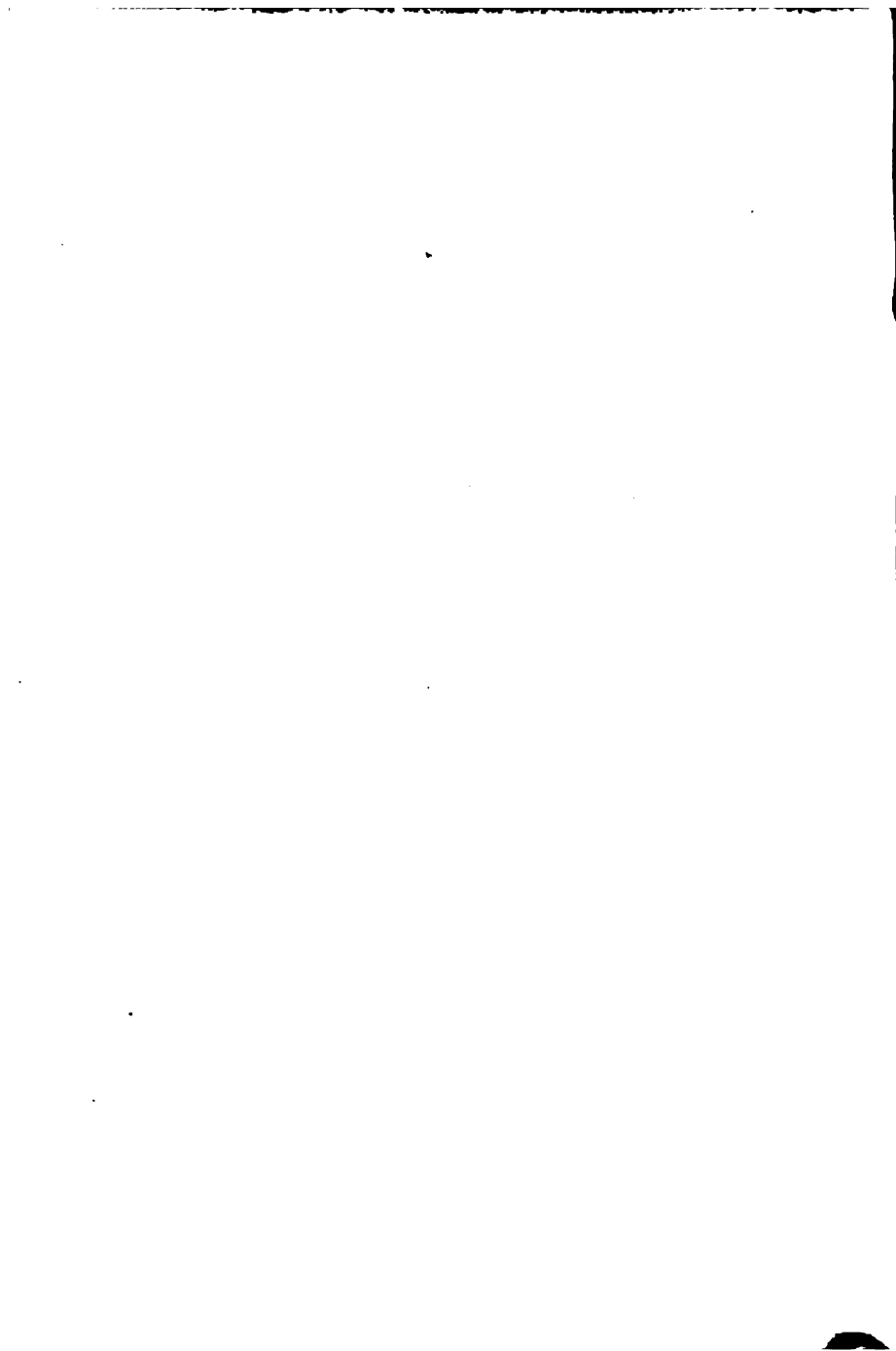
Take it how you will—whether the fact be welcome or not—"sex," as it is called (with the quotation marks), shares with one or two other big things the distinction of being a primal force in the life of the world. It is real; it is vital. And as *Young's Magazine* and *Breezy Stories* want vital fiction, they seek stories of love and its attendant emotions as they affect and as they are expressed in life as it is lived; not the tenuous sentimentalism of the "mushy" love-story—moonshine and bubbles, beautiful airy nothings that touch *life* at not a single point.

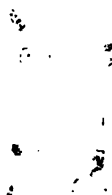
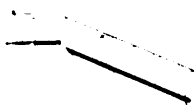
CASHEL POMEROY.

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